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ABSTRACT

This report examines the issues, needs, and strategies related to professional development in small, rural schools in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Information was gathered by a survey, a series of rural education forums, and case study interviews. Respondents of the survey and participants of forums were legislators, practitioners, members of professional associations, and state policymakers. They identified factors that limited professional development, including geographic and professional isolation, community attitudes, time, fiscal resources, and irrelevant opportunities. Strategies for overcoming these constraints included networking, telecommunications, using outside service agencies, conferences and workshops, restructuring of school time, and providing incentives. The literature review revealed four dimensions (defined need, leadership, school climate, and staff ownership) that needed consideration when creating professional development opportunities. When implementing change, important elements were: administrator turnover, age and experience of the staff, and the school culture. Three cultural types of schools are described along with conditions under which these types develop. Professional and geographic isolation can be successfully overcome by: (1) developing supportive standards that account for the unique nature of rural communities; (2) recognizing that change comes from inside people; (3) stressing the importance of leadership and incentives; and (4) recognizing that professional renewal must be continuous and collaborative. Nine rural staff development programs are described that illustrate strategies for overcoming professional isolation. (30 references) (LP)

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THE Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

PROGRAM REPORT

ED344707

OVERCOMING PROFESSIONAL ISOLATION IN SMALL, RURAL SCHOOLS

September 1991

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OVERCOMING PROFESSIONAL ISOLATION IN SMALL, RURAL SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Professional development and renewal in education is essential for the improvement of student learning. Because constraints such as geographic and professional isolation, small budgets, and staff turnover are common among many small, rural schools, they face a great challenge in implementing professional improvement opportunities and programs. This report examines the issues, needs, and strategies relating to professional development and renewal in small, rural schools.

Data for the development of this report were drawn from a wide range of interrelated sources and activities:

- a series of rural education forums focusing on professional renewal in four Northwest states;
- a review of the research on rural staff development;
- case study interviews of stakeholders from two small, rural schools;
- an analysis of school and community conditions supportive of school change; and
- a review of rural staff development programs.

Geographic and professional isolation, community attitudes, time, fiscal resources and irrelevant opportunities were identified by forum participants as key factors limiting professional development and renewal. Strategies used to overcome these constraints included networking, telecommunications, utilizing outside service agencies, conferences and workshops, restructuring school time, and providing incentives.

Research on rural staff development and professional renewal were found to be quite limited. However, four general dimensions for developing professional renewal opportunities were identified: defined need, leadership, school climate, and staff ownership. Using these four dimensions as a framework for analyzing case study interviews from two small, rural schools, revealed that administrative turnover, age and experience of the staff, and the historical and community context within which the school is situated are vital elements to consider when implementing school change. Taken together, these elements interact to produce a school's culture that may support or inhibit professional renewal.

A further analysis of the school culture concept revealed that the type of change desired, the unique qualities of the community, and such factors as the administrator's words and

deeds, staff goal consensus regarding the purpose of instruction, and staff relations help determine the nature of the school's culture. Three cultural types of schools were described along with conditions which facilitate their development.

It was concluded that professional and geographic isolation can be successfully overcome. However, to do so requires developing norms supportive of professional renewal. The following areas were found to be critical in developing such norms: understanding the unique nature of the rural community, that change comes from inside people, the central role of leadership, the importance of incentives, and that professional renewal must be continuous and collaborative.

Finally, a collection of rural staff development programs were described that illustrare the variables found to promote norms supportive of professional renewal.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

SETTING THE STAGE 1

Survey and Forum Work Group Results 3

Professional Renewal Needs 3

Factors Limiting Professional Renewal 4

Strategies Facilitating Professional Renewal 7

Summary 10

LITERATURE REVIEW 10

CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS FROM TWO SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS 14

The Eastside School 15

Interview Results 15

Summary 18

The Westside School 18

Interview Results 19

Summary 22

Making Sense of the Eastside and Westside Staff Renewal Efforts 23

RURAL DIVERSITY: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ISOLATION 26

Classroom Related Factors 28

School Related Factors 28

Socio-Cultural Factors 29

Rural Community Influence 30

School and Community Culture and the Process of Change 31

Summary 38

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS 38

Illustrative Rural Staff Development Strategies and Programs 44

Programs and Approaches 47

Writing Process 47

Field Experience 50

Professional Reading Groups 53

Telecommunications 58

Administrative Leadership 61

Networks 63

REFERENCES 68

INTRODUCTION

This report by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) describes issues relating to staff development and renewal in small, rural schools. This topic area was selected by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Rural Advisory Committee. The committee is made up of rural educators and business leaders representing Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. Under the auspices of the Rural Education Program, the Rural Advisory Committee develops and selects an issue that members believe to be of significant concern to rural educators throughout the Northwest. Professional isolation in small, rural schools was selected for the 1990-91 school year. The Rural Advisory Committee believes the isolation of many small, rural schools creates a formidable challenge for rural educators desiring to improve programs and enhance their professional growth. Although this topic has been drawn from Northwest rural educators, professional isolation is also a critical issue to educators in other rural areas of the United States.

In order to better comprehend the various dimensions of this concern, a survey, followed by focus work groups, was conducted in four regions of the Northwest. This was followed by a review of research on rural professional development and case study interviews of rural teachers, students, parents, board members and administrators from two small, rural schools. From these activities emerged a set of implications and guidelines for overcoming professional isolation. A series of professional development programs were then reviewed as illustrative examples of strategies for overcoming professional isolation.

SETTING THE STAGE

During the spring of 1991, a series of rural education forums was held by NWREL in conjunction with the Departments of Education in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Respondents were selected because of their affiliation with rural education and/or because they represented key constituent groups from across the region who had direct or indirect impact on rural education. These groups included legislators, educational practitioners, professional association representatives, and state policy makers (Table 1). Prior to the forums, participants were sent a survey that asked for responses to several questions:

- Is professional isolation an issue demanding attention?
- Why or why not?

- What renewal strategies have you observed or used?

Table 1. Roles Represented by Forum Survey Participants

Role*	Idaho	Montana	Oregon	Washington	Total
Teachers	2	1	1	1	5
Administrators	8	4	20	5	37
Policy Makers	2	6	2	1	11
Local - State Boards	2	1	2	2	7
Parents	2	1	0	0	3
University	5	3	7	3	18
Professional Associations	5	3	1	1	10
Consortia	2	2	0	1	5
Intermediate Service Agencies	na	na	2	3	5

Survey responses were analyzed for common issues and themes. Four questions guided analysis:

1. Did respondents feel professional isolation to be a problem in small, rural schools?
2. What rationale and evidence was given for their response?
3. What issues could be discerned across the region?
4. How did respondents address professional renewal in isolated schools?

Rural education forums were held after survey data were collected and compiled. During each forum, small groups used the survey data to refine and elaborate upon the results.

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* Some roles are double counts such as a teaching principal

While survey results reflect a broad sweep of issues and concerns, the work group activities provided a more focused and in-depth response to the two survey questions. In addition, work groups were given a third question which asked them to speculate on how they could work together to bring about desired changes.

Survey and Forum Work Group Results

Professional Renewal Needs

More than 95 percent of the survey respondents identified staff renewal in rural schools as a significant issue requiring special attention. Nine general areas of need emerged:

- **Staying current and informed of new knowledge and trends:** A rapidly changing knowledge base requires educators to continually learn, "the world is changing too rapidly for any teacher to sit still." Isolated teachers can easily feel "stuck in the woods" because of the limited opportunities for growth. One respondent indicated that 75 percent of the participants attending a nationally recognized training workshop "had never heard of the materials and techniques we have been using for over three years." State and national trends appear to be pushing a "redefinition of what constitutes school . . . New organizational patterns of curriculum . . . New groups involved/empowered . . . New patterns of governance."

- **Encouraging and supporting protected time for teachers to share and collaborate within and across schools:** Teachers "welcome the opportunity to visit with others and learn new things." Because of time and geographic distances, "it is becoming more critical than ever before for professionals to exchange ideas and learn from each other . . . Making opportunities for educational professionals to visit colleagues, discuss trends, and express ideas is critical."

- **Renewing "stagnant" and/or reticent staff:** "There has been a tendency for rural education to isolate itself from new innovations in the field." "Schools and teachers sometimes give evidence of being self-satisfied with the status quo." In addition, "we have many long-time teachers and administrators in all districts." "How do you motivate a 'burned-out' teacher?" "The isolation of educators in a rural environment may lead to professional stagnation. School board members also need opportunities to take part in growth activities so they can see the bigger picture."

- **Developing new skills:** Rural educators need to "acquire skills to utilize any new, pertinent information." For example, "Staff need to learn computer skills and technology updates [and] elementary teachers need to build their confidence in the physical sciences."

- **Providing incentives:** "Some teachers will not take professional development workshops or inservice unless they receive college credits or can take training during school hours." However, "college credit is hard to come by."

- **Energizing, motivating and retaining staff:** "Outside stimulation--resource people brought in--is a need." "Simple opportunities for interaction and professional sharing is a big need." "Professional renewal is the rejuvenating force the teaching profession requires to be at its best." " 'I am the only one in the world faced with this problem' makes professional renewal necessary--unless we want to continue the drain of the very best teachers and administrators to larger districts."

- **Reinforcing and validating teaching practice:** "We need more contact with other professionals of similar interests to reinforce each other."

- **Providing for the training needs of inexperienced and new personnel:** "Teacher turnover and frequent placement of new, inexperienced teachers are issues requiring systematic renewal opportunities."

- **State certification requirements:** Specialists, such as counselors and special education personnel, require updated credentials.

These nine areas reflect a wide range of interrelated concerns and needs. For example, creating time for teachers to share may be an important way to help teachers stay current regarding educational innovations and trends. In a similar manner, supporting teacher collaboration tends to help reinforce and validate teaching practices, which in turn may be an incentive for engaging in professional renewal. If effort is expended to reduce the need in one area, there is likely to be a spill-over effect reducing or eliminating needs in other areas. In order to understand these needs and how they reside in the unique context of small, rural schools. this paper will examine the barriers and limiting factors identified by survey and forum participants.

Factors Limiting Professional Renewal

Analysis of survey data and results emerging from the forum work groups revealed six factors believed to be key obstacles limiting professional development and renewal in small, rural schools. Table 2 provides an overview of these key factors along with related participant comments. Like the needs areas previously discussed, these factors interrelate with one another. Geographic isolation easily contributes to professional isolation. However, an educator can be professionally isolated even when not geographically distant. This is the case in many schools where the demands of teaching and the lack of time nearly eliminate the opportunity for teachers to professionally interact.

Table 2. Factors Limiting Professional Development and Renewal

Limiting Factors	Illustrative Examples
Geographic Isolation: Thirty or more miles to another school, institution of higher education or other sites providing opportunities for professional renewal.	• "Geography often distances us from getting the professional renewal we all need to stay current." • "The proximity of colleges and universities, as well as sites for professional conferences, are limiting factors for adequate staff development." • "Some teachers live too far from post-secondary institutions to make continuing education possible." • "There is often a lack of substitutes for teachers to be gone."
Professional Isolation: The lack of opportunity to share and interact with peers.	• "Isolation is deadly, both personally and professionally." • "There are times when board, teachers and administrators need reassurances. Sometimes we develop the 'knee-jerk' syndrome because of uncertainty. We need more contact with other professionals of similar interest to reinforce each other."
Community Attitude: Community attitudes and beliefs appear unfavorable toward professional development activities during school hours.	• "Rural educators often wear numerous hats so their absences are readily noticed in the community. The politics of 'keeping educators home where they belong' is more apparent in rural America." • "There is a problem with the attitude of administrators/school boards about going to 'nice' places, to national conferences - 'hired you to teach, not to be gone.' "

Table 2. Continued

Limiting Factors	Illustrative Examples
Time: Demands on time outweigh available time.	• "In some localities the teaching job is a supplement to the major family enterprise of farming, ranching, or other endeavors. When this is the case, summers and evenings are taken up by responsibilities. This leaves little time for professional renewal." • "Isolation and the development of collegial teams has been difficult as a result of time factors and distance." • "There are too many other activities to supervise that prevent active participation." • "How do you balance all the hats rural educators wear . . . meeting all the requirements of all the jobs done by too few administrators and teachers?"
Fiscal Resources: Limited or non-existent financial resources for supporting professional growth opportunities.	• "It is difficult for small districts to send people to meetings or afford to bring in expensive experts." • "There are little or no dollars or time budgeted for professional growth."
Irrelevant Opportunities: Professional opportunities do not match the personal or instructional needs of rural educators.	• "K-8 'one room' schools [are unique]." • "In a very small district - one teacher teaches many subjects."

Time demands appear as a pervasive plague in schools, especially in small, rural schools where there are few or no specialists, little scheduled preparation time, and often an increased requirement for planning, materials preparation, and supervision. In addition, there also may be problems with limited resources, few substitute teachers, and community beliefs that do not support teachers being out of the classroom--thus creating professional isolation. These factors have the potential to prevent time for staff renewal, whether it be visiting other classrooms and schools, or simply reading about a new instructional strategy.

Strategies Facilitating Professional Renewal

Not all is disheartening. Rural educators are resourceful and creative people. Forum participants described many strategies for providing professional development opportunities despite the barriers and limiting factors described. But desire, will, and creativity are not sufficient conditions for overcoming these constraints. Professional staff renewal and development must be a school and district priority supported by district and community commitments of both time and money. One might respond to this observation by pointing out that there are rural districts with neither time nor money. The seven strategy areas compiled from the survey and forum data (listed below) suggest obtainable options for even those who believe their hands are tied by limited resources.

1. Networking, Consortia and Cooperatives

Strategies frequently mentioned for overcoming geographic and professional isolation included the use of networks, consortia and interdistrict cooperatives. Through multidistrict staff development activities, teachers and administrators have the opportunities to share ideas, resources, and personnel. These activities were described in many different formats:

- Sharing costs for telecommunications equipment
- Developing grant proposals on a joint basis
- Sharing the cost of bringing in consultants and courses
- Community networking through shared goal setting
- Developing a directory of educational expertise
- Developing a resource guide of innovations in rural schools
- Setting up area school board councils

2. Telecommunications

Telecommunications was described as having the greatest potential for eliminating many of the problems associated with geographical isolation. It also provides excellent networking capability, thus enhancing professional peer interaction. Many forum participants mentioned schools that were using telecommunications for staff development, sharing ideas, and bringing in classes. The following illustrates the range of ideas presented:

- Monthly inservice via satellite
- Using CD Rom to access the ERIC data base
- Logging onto electronic bulletin boards for exchanging information and ideas
- Accessing credit classes and workshops
- Teleconferencing around specific issues and problems

However, telecommunications is not without problems. Cost, a lack of face-to-face interaction, sometimes poor quality of reception, and T.V. presentations were mentioned as hurdles.

3. Utilizing the Services of Outside Agencies

Numerous agencies provide services to educators, often for little or no cost. The most obvious are the state departments of education. In Oregon and Washington, Educational Service Agencies provide such services. The following agencies were mentioned:

- Rural Electrification Association
- National Diffusion Network facilitators within each state
- Local and state professional associations in subject areas such as math, science and English
- Professional development centers in Oregon
- Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

4. Classes, Workshops and Conferences

Classes were the most common strategy mentioned for staff renewal. These included classes held on-site through telecommunication programs such as STAR schools, attending courses at an intermediate service agency or a college, and drive-in workshops. For example, one participant said that the district would send an individual to a conference with the understanding that the person would provide inservice upon return. Some states had well-developed rural organizations that sponsored summer institutes. In Oregon, for example, the Small Schools Association sponsors a week-long summer institute for rural teachers. Credit and housing are conveniently available. Western Montana College has a similar conference.

5. Restructuring Time

Time is an important element in successful efforts at staff renewal and development. The lack of time ran throughout the survey and forum comments. Through the manipulation of schedules, use of parent volunteers, and scheduled inservice days, blocks of time can be created. However, as mentioned earlier, district decision makers must value professional renewal and see its benefits. Several examples will provide a flavor for the strategies described:

- Principal covers class(es) while teachers plan together
- Parent volunteers provide special presentations once a week while teachers engage in renewal activities
- Increase inservice days on the school calendar
- Provide early-release time once a month

6. Providing Incentives

Many of the incentives mentioned can easily fall within the other categories. For example, making staff development a priority by providing extra inservice days or supporting monthly release time are often incentives. Incentives may also vary depending on the age, experience, and expertise of the educator. The following were submitted as strategies:

- Provide days for celebrating education and teaching
- Obtain credit options for inservice activities
- Provide funds to help defray costs of professional memberships

- Bring in motivational speakers

One suggestion illustrates how one district used Chapter 2 funds to make staff renewal a priority:

> We are using Chapter 2 funds to promote professional growth for school employees and board members. These activities range from inservice sessions to sending individuals to local, state, and national conferences.

7. Other

Several other promising strategies were mentioned that focus on activities that can be implemented at low cost. Individualized staff development plans that allow a wide variation in how and when the plans would be implemented could be developed. This might mean a teacher is given special release time for classroom observation, professional reading, or preparing materials for an experimental teaching strategy. Reciprocal school visitations where school A dismisses students for a day and visits school B are another possibility. At another time, school B returns the visit.

Summary

The data presented indicate that small, rural schools, given their isolation, limited resource base, and small size, must overcome many obstacles to facilitate professional renewal. However, rural schools also have advantages. Often, the people who work there have learned to be resourceful and creative, as illustrated by the professional development strategies presented by the rural educators who participated in the rural education forums.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research literature on rural education is sparse, but research focusing on rural staff development appears nearly non-existent. In 1987, Wood and Kleine conducted a review of the literature on staff development in rural settings. They determined that few conclusions could be drawn with any certainty. Of the few studies Wood and Kleine located, problems with methodology and limited scope prevented any conclusions on their effectiveness. Hoover (1989) came to a similar conclusion: "Little empirical information exists to provide an accurate portrait of education in rural, small schools--including staff development practices and needs in such schools" (p. 1).

Problems in rural research literature center around a lack of rigor and quantity of research projects. Rural research data, as Sher (1989) points out, ". . . supports nearly any characterization" of rural, small schools (p. 259). As a result, conclusions drawn from this limited research base are often riddled with contradictions. Hoover (1989) identifies three factors that help explain these contradictions:

- a majority of educational research has focused on non-rural education settings;
- conclusion often reflect "folklore" and opinion instead of empirical evidence; and
- the diverse nature of rural communities and settings creates barriers to safe generalizations regarding rural educational practices.

The long-time research emphasis on urban education has led to staff development approaches that reflect an ideology often referred to as the "one best system" (Tyack, 1974; Nachtigal, 1982). Because of the diverse nature of rural schools, the urban models of staff development often fail to meet the needs of rural school districts. Rural schools and communities reflect many factors that urban and metropolitan staff development programs cannot generally address, such as multigrade classrooms, small size, limited financial and human resources, and geographic isolation.

The community context is of critical importance in rural staff development. According to Gjelten (1978), professional renewal "must begin in the mold of traditions, values, and beliefs in which the school is set" (p. 11). Teachers need to understand those community norms in order to ensure that educational strategies will be supported. If possible, the community should be involved in change efforts (Hoover, 1989). McLaughlin (1982) notes, "In rural school improvement, understanding and trust of the local social structure appears to be as important as professional expertise" (p. 286).

Despite the diversity found among rural schools, similarities do exist. Changes in the national economy in recent years have placed many rural communities in distress, especially those dependent on extractive industry. Rural teachers and administrators face time constraints such as multiple preparations, extracurricular activities, and other outside duties (e.g. janitor, bus driver, etc.). Hoover (1989) concludes, "Rural, small schools have a greater tendency to be resource-bound . . . as a group, rural schools tend to have a narrower tax base, and [are] highly susceptible to ups and downs within the local economy" (p. 3 - 4). Staff development and professional renewal can be built upon these similarities.

Given this diversity and the commonalities that unite rural schools, how can school personnel be motivated to seek professional renewal? Many factors affect a school faculty's dedication and willingness to participate in professional renewal. Incentives that affect motivation include college credit, subscriptions to professional publications, memberships in professional organizations, release time, reimbursement for classes and workshops, stipends, and especially professional recognition.

Discussed later in this report are the case studies of Eastside and Westside wherein motivation appeared to be affected by the staffs age and/or background. The older

teachers and the teachers with the most seniority at the schools were generally more resistant to change and/or wanted change to take place at a slower pace. The younger teachers and the teachers newer to the school were less threatened by the idea of exploring new teaching practices.

This relationship between teacher motivation, professional renewal, and the age of teachers has basically been unexplored. The average age of teachers continues to rise (Dembowski & Gay, 1980), thus increasing the importance of understanding the needs of an aging staff.

Howser (1989) conducted a study to determine why older teachers often are "reluctant to learn and grow." Howser compared teachers perceived by principals to be "growth seeking" with those perceived to be "reluctant" to change. Howser defined "reluctant" teachers as:

> typically middle-aged (35 to 55 years old), experienced teachers (15 to 25 years of teaching). They are stagnant in their professional growth and resistant to change. Reluctant teachers have hundreds of reasons for not changing and are comfortable with the way things are "right now." They are the teachers who have "retired," yet remain in the classroom. (p. 4)

Howser (1989) gives several suggestions on how to encourage reluctant teachers to learn and grow:

- Reluctant teachers respond to positive attention when conveyed through a nonthreatening approach, along with technical support.
- The fear of failure some teachers may feel needs to be replaced with encouragement by peers and administrators.
- Administrators should rethink job entrenchment and devise schedules and assignments reflecting flexibility and mobility so teachers can experience several different work environments and teaching levels.
- Districts need to promote teacher leadership, either through site-based management, collaborative work teams, or shared decision-making.
- Learning and growing is personal for all teachers and should be addressed on an individual basis (p. 38-39).

Howser also discovered that both growth-seeking and reluctant teachers enjoyed the opportunity to discuss their profession. The participants in Howser's study had never had the opportunity to share their feelings with administrators and felt that administrators were not interested in what they had to say.

Teachers' motivation to renew is also affected by their sense of ownership in the process. The most effective strategies for staff development are those in which the needs and strategies come directly from the participating staff. For the process of renewal to be effective, Hoover (1989) concludes, "it must be systematic, needs-based, participant-owned, and supported over time" (p. 8).

Fullan (1982) lists seven reasons why inservice activities often fail to create significant changes in a teacher's classroom practice:

1. One-shot workshops are widespread, but ineffective.
2. Topics are frequently selected by people other than those for whom the inservice is intended.
3. Follow-up support for ideas and practices occurs in only a small minority of cases.
4. Follow-up evaluation occurs infrequently.
5. Inservice programs rarely address the participants' needs and concerns.
6. The majority of programs involve teachers from many different schools and/or school districts, but there is no recognition of the different systems to which they must return.
7. There is a profound lack of any conceptual basis in the planning and implementing of inservice programs that would ensure their effectiveness.

Four dimensions of professional development emerged from the literature review and provide a framework or a set of guidelines for planning and evaluating staff development programs in rural schools. Although these dimension are not definitive, they do include key considerations found to be necessary for successful professional renewal programs and activities.

Four Key Dimensions of Professional Development

Defined Need

- Are staff development programs and activities based on clearly identified needs?
- Have individual goals been integrated with school and district goals?

Leadership

- Does the administration encourage teacher leadership roles?
- Are there provisions for sustained long-term professional development support?
- Do principals participate in all the activities with their teachers?

School Climate

- Have the norms and values of the community been taken into consideration?
- Are school communications clear, open, and credible?
- Do teachers have the opportunity to try out and practice new behaviors, exchange ideas, and receive helpful feedback in a supportive climate?

Staff Ownership

- Are staff members collaboratively involved in selecting renewal goals and school changes that will be addressed?
- Have incentives been identified that will motivate teachers and administrators to seek professional growth?
- Has time to work on staff renewal and assimilate new learning been provided?
- Have the maturity and experience of the staff been considered in program design and implementation?

CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS FROM TWO SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS

In order to broaden the survey and forum results on professional isolation and to provide a context for interpreting the literature review findings, case study interviews were held in two small, rural schools having difficulty bringing about staff renewal and change. In these two schools, factors facilitating and/or inhibiting successful professional renewal were discerned through the eyes of teachers, parents, board members, support staff, and students. The pseudonyms Eastside and Westside will be used for these two schools.

Both schools were identified for this investigation because the administrators requested help in determining how to motivate their staffs to engage in renewal and improvement efforts. Moreover, the two schools represent stark contrasts in terms of their isolation

and access to resources. Eastside represents a relatively poor K-12 school with declining enrollment. It is located in an isolated and remote area in the mountains on the east side of the state. The Westside School reflects a K-5 school with an increasing enrollment and is located on the west side of the mountains in close proximity to a university and an Educational Service District office. In addition, Westside was recently awarded a two-year, $8,000 staff development grant.

Both schools have completed a systematic school improvement process conducted by a consultant facilitator. The Eastside staff was unable to reach consensus on an improvement goal or agree on what they could do to improve their school. Westside, on the other hand, selected a goal, developed an implementation plan and was into its first year of implementation. Ironically, both school administrators felt they were not making sufficient progress and were plagued with a common question: How do I motivate all staff to engage in professional renewal?

The Eastside School

Eighteen students in grades 9-12 and 34 students in grades K-8 attend Eastside School. The term "country school" is a fitting portrayal for the three-story white building with a bell tower conspicuously perched on top. All elementary instruction occurs in multigrade classrooms organized into grades 1-3 and grades 4-6. In the junior and senior high school, students are also multigraded for the majority of subjects. The school uses distance learning technology to bring in advanced courses for the high school students. Without this programming, it is unlikely the school would maintain state accreditation.

During the school visitation, classroom instruction was not formally observed, but each classroom was visited and the school explored. For the most part, classrooms, hallways, office space, and the cafeteria were bright and decorated. The school appeared clean and well-maintained. Contact with students and staff were congenial and open. This appeared to be a school where great things could be occurring for students. Given its small size, the presence of a large Forest Service office in the community, and the friendliness of the local people, the learning environment could easily be stretched to include the whole community.

Interview Results

Defined Needs

Everyone interviewed suggested needs they would like to see addressed. Students felt they would like to have greater involvement in setting learning goals for themselves and an opportunity to be involved in deciding how they would learn. They also voiced a desire to have a greater variety of learning opportunities rather than the "same thing" from grades 4-12. Instructional variety is often a problem for teachers and students in

very small schools because students generally spend a large proportion of their time with the same teachers. As a result, teaching strategies become overly familiar and fail to motivate students. It therefore becomes imperative that professional renewal become an active part of the school routine.

For teachers, the most dominant need was a desire for improved communications and support, followed by a need to develop more effective skills in working with multiple grades in a single classroom. Several specific comments help illustrate teacher concerns. One teacher felt the administrator's "communications convey anger and dissatisfaction, never a positive stroke." Another teacher said that a "large percentage of staff feels negative" and there is "incredible back-biting and a feeling of 'out to get the superintendent' which creates great stress."

In terms of multigrade needs, one teacher said, "I would like a resource list of other people who can help with multigrade planning, materials development, and strategies." There was also a keen interest in learning "how other multigrade teachers organize the day and use cooperative learning and whole language."

Administration and board members also identified needs, some quite consistent with views expressed by students and teachers. The superintendent/principal confessed that "I'm the worst communicator in the world. I'm not sure how to approach teachers." He also felt there were serious instructional problems that needed to be solved. For example, he said that the English teacher taught "excessive amounts of grammar and no literature." In addition, he had strong concerns about how high school students were treated: "Lack of humanistic treatment toward kids. Students are ridiculed."

The three board members voiced concerns about the lack of instructional variety in many classrooms. Interestingly, the administrator had two children in the high school program, and each board member had children in the elementary school. This appeared to create a double bind, especially for the superintendent/principal. For example, student interviews involved the administrator's daughter who quoted her father regarding needs in the high school English class. The following list illustrates the range of board and administrator concerns:

- Improve communication skills which demonstrate greater respect and acceptance of students
- Improve instructional strategies for motivating students
- Improve communication and climate in the school
- Develop counseling skills for all staff
- Learn to use resources outside the school for instruction

Leadership

Concerns regarding leadership centered around a need for support and consistency within the school. By his own admission, the superintendent/principal said he could not motivate staff to make changes that were in the best interest of the students. He had a vision of a school where the community was used as an instructional resource; where students worked cooperatively on thematic units across grade levels; and where students were highly motivated to learn. The majority of teachers interpreted this vision as an indictment of their instruction and responded at a personal level with anger and hostility. A common lament from teachers suggests some of their concerns, "Too much curriculum, always new demands . . . telling teachers how they should teach. He has little credibility." There was one exception worth noting.

Buck, a high school teacher who had moved to the community from the city, appeared to exemplify the administrator's vision. He organized instruction across grades using cooperative work groups. Thematic units were taught. Buck described staff morale as very low, but said he had learned to keep to himself. Students indicated they respected Buck and described him as someone who, "listens to us and makes us feel like we're smart and accepted." Ironically, Buck indicated he was leaving the school at the end of the year.

Teachers also shared concerns relating to daily communication and the need to know in advance when events might affect instruction. For example, they said they would like to know when duties would be changing, when personnel were absent, and any other event that might affect the schedule. Leadership needs do not appear to have been explored in terms of leadership roles that could be shared by all staff members. These might include someone taking responsibility for staff development, monitoring student performance school-wide, developing resources outside the school, a discipline review committee, a community involvement task force, etc.

School Climate

This appeared to be the most pressing area of need by everyone interviewed, including students. Students didn't feel they were listened to or treated like capable learners by a majority of the school staff. Teachers felt they were not listened to or rewarded for their efforts. The superintendent/principal felt the staff failed to understand his commitment to the school and the students' education. The district has had a new administrator about every two or three years for the past decade. With such rapid turnover, there simply may not be enough time to develop the trust and support necessary for successful renewal efforts.

Communication seemed to be especially problematic between long-time staff and the school administrator. The superintendent/principal was quite candid during his interview

and indicated he knew he was not always the best communicator, but he voiced a desire to develop more effective skills. Several teachers indicated that communication with the superintendent was good. In general, everyone had their own view of events in the school; there were enough differing interpretations to indicate that people had, for all practical purposes, given up trying to understand the needs of one another or the impact the poor school climate had on students. However, everyone appeared honestly committed to doing a good job for kids.

Staff Ownership

During interviews, I was unable to find evidence that staff felt ownership for any event in the school except their own classrooms. Even here, there was a strong feeling by many staff of encroachment by the superintendent/principal. In part, this may be due to a feeling that many events occurring in the school had not had sufficient staff involvement during decision-making. Moreover, teachers mentioned that the school had experienced a succession of administrators over the last ten years. The current superintendent/principal was the fourth within that time frame. One teacher raised doubts about whether the school district could even attract quality personnel given the low salary: "The board doesn't offer a superintendent salary that is competitive enough to get the best."

Summary

Clearly, the overriding issue that needs to be addressed in the Eastside School was the improvement of the school climate: communication, staff relations, student-teacher relations, and school-community relations. In part, this need appears related to a leadership void, reflecting a mixture of administrative turnover and poor communications skills. Although not every person in the school had difficulty in each of these areas, the magnitude of the problem affected everyone. Secondly, everyone interviewed agreed there was a need for staff development activities relating to planning and teaching in the multigrade classroom. However, the school climate inhibited positive changes. School personnel appearred to be at a standstill. From the administrator's perspective, teachers did not want to change in ways that would improve instruction and their relations with students. From the teachers' perspective, the administrator failed to support and respect teachers. The end result was that the negative climate drove a wedge between students, staff, and the community, thus creating professional isolation and bringing school-wide professional renewal to a standstill.

The Westside School

Westside is a small K-5 elementary school of 131 students. It is located just off an interstate highway four miles from a small town, and approximately 20 miles from access to a university and a state educational service center. At one time, Westside School was

a single-building district but within the last 12 years, it consolidated with the town district. Although close to a metropolitan area, the school retains a rural, country feeling.

During a day-long visit, it was observed that classrooms, hallways, office space, and the cafeteria were bright, clean and well-maintained. Parents and staff were friendly and everyone was easy to talk with and appeared open. Given its small size, access to a wealth of resources, and the friendliness of the people, the potential for program growth at Westside seemed far-reaching.

Interview Results

Everyone interviewed from the Westside School and community voiced positive regard for the school, students, community, and staff. In the words of one parent, a "great school for kids--kids are successful." Positive observations from parents and school staff fell into four general categories. Samples from each category will provide a flavor for the extent of responses:

School: "Great school, I have always had my kids go here."

"Very special school because it is small and personal."

"Beautification project has been wonderful. The physical appearance made a difference."

Staff: "The teachers really like kids. They are a warm, caring staff."

"I received good diagnostic progress reports from kindergarten and fourth grades."

School Climate: "I have appreciated the opportunity to work with other teachers on curriculum alignment."

"The new staff meeting structure has improved meetings."

"In some ways, there are improved communications. The calendar and newsletter have been very helpful. I know what is going on. I'm kept informed."

"Communication has improved, e.g., communication notebook in staff room and daily news bulletins."

Community: "We have supportive parents."

"I see more parents around. They feel very positive about coming into school--staff is always willing to help."

> "There is a greater emphasis on parent involvement--parents are better informed and there are more opportunities for parent involvement."

These comments reflect a wide range of points of view, experience, and roles in the school and community. Everyone had something positive to say, whether a first-year teacher or seasoned veteran, part-time or full-time staff member, community activist, or support staff member. Comments demonstrated people felt positive about Westside, felt growth was occurring, and liked working and visiting the school. However, participants also believed there was room for additional growth, especially in terms of how face-to-face communication and decision-making were carried out.

Defined Needs

Many needs relating to student performance and teacher instructional practice came out during interviews. Most frequently mentioned were instructional grouping, student motivation, and increasing teacher awareness of instructional practice and curriculum use throughout the school. These areas appear to be driven by the school's recent staff development grant and a school improvement process Westside had participated in a year ago. For example, staff chose improving student math performance as their school-wide goal. They selected cross-grade grouping as one strategy to help them achieve their goal. However, teachers were split on the effectiveness of using groups.

The primary-grade teachers felt little change was occurring. The intermediate-grade teachers felt change was happening too fast and possibly in the wrong direction. The fifth grade teacher said, "Extreme differences between grades makes cross-grade grouping by skills impossible;" the fourth-grade teacher said the staff "needs to discuss, define and establish parameters for how grouping will be implemented throughout the school." Primary-grade teachers suggested that teachers pilot some new grouping strategies: "Develop a couple of school-wide interest-group activities" or "try specific skill groups across grades for a short period of time."

The intermediate-grade teachers were the most senior staff, with an average of 25 years experience in the same school. The primary-grade teachers averaged 16 years in teaching, but had taught in a variety of schools. Staff had become polarized over conflicting views about instructional grouping. At an even more basic level, they were divided over the need for and the rate of change in the school. The conflict prevented staff from addressing other needs, such as motivating students and learning about what other teachers were doing.

Leadership

Questions directly addressing leadership were not asked during interviews. However, important issues relating to leadership did surface. The most telling issue relates to

administrative turnover and the impact that it has on the role of staff (especially those who survive the turnover). The current principal had been in the district for two years. During that time, he had been successful in funding a grant on staff development and implementing a cooperative school beautification project with the local university. He also had brought in a school improvement training program that teachers completed the previous year.

One informant who had worked in the district for 14 years, said Westside has had a succession of administrators over the last ten years--many "just filling in time" until something better comes along. In the past, the "school has not been given high priority by the district." Such turnover generally forces teachers and other school personnel to assume many of the responsibilities associated with a school administrator. Often, each administrator brings an agenda for change. As a result, teachers often become cautious about new ideas.

School staff quickly learn that if they simply wait long enough, any new program or idea will fade away. Such passive resistance has both a positive and a negative side. On the positive side, teachers protect instructional time from the destabilizing influence of each new administrator. On the negative side, teachers can become resistant to change, even when it is in the best interest of children. This appears to be the case with the intermediate grade teachers.

But there also appeared to be concerns regarding the principal's leadership style. A majority of long-time personnel, including cooks and custodial personnel, felt the principal was too brisk, too task-focused, often making them feel as if they could not do their jobs. The custodial person, for example, had worked at the school for 12 years before the current principal. During this time, she scheduled all after-school use of the gym. However, the principal changed the schedule after it was set. When she tried to talk with him, he "acts as if he doesn't have time to listen." Such concerns over communication were mentioned frequently.

School Climate and Staff Ownership

The majority of those interviewed indicated that a school climate of mutual trust and support was a critical need. Ironically, in the last two years, staff had been highly involved in site-based decision-making. This resulted in a high level of direct involvement in their grant activities. The focus on collaboration within the staff development grant illustrates both an understanding of the need for ownership, and the need for mutual support and trust. Some changes in the school appeared to be helping create more trust: a new format for staff meetings, a sign-in log book in the staff room and the opportunity for aligning curriculum. However, nearly everyone said more needs to be done. Information shared in the interviews suggests that the way people have been

communicating with one another may be a major reason why concerns about program implementation and change have been raised in the first place.
A majority of staff said their opinions were not understood and/or their ideas were not accepted. For example, during staff meetings an instructional strategy or idea would be presented for possible use in the school. The discussion would quickly end because one or more staff would say, "I tried that; it doesn't work." This pattern of response was described often during interviews, suggesting such dialogue had become the norm during staff meetings. Interestingly, it began to appear that even those who most desired to try new ideas were saying, "We tried this before and it didn't work." In other words, many staff conveyed a sense of futility toward the discussion and implementation of new or different ideas.

Another staff member indicated that during staff meetings, people conveyed their lack of acceptance through body language: "turning away, folding arms and looking disinterested." It was suggested that the staff needs to openly discuss the kinds of issues raised during my interviews without feeling that "what you say will be held against you." There was also a feeling that the way people communicated conveyed a lack of trust or belief in a person's judgment and skills. However, no one indicated that the staff had tried to discuss these communication issues.

Much of this frustration over communications appears to have led to a division between the primary (grades K-3) and the upper-grade (grades 4-5) teachers. It appeared that the primary grade teachers embraced the idea of change with enthusiasm, while the upper-grade teachers conveyed a sense of caution. However, upper-grade teachers left the impression that they would explore new strategies only if they felt it was worth the investment in time and energy.

This concern over change illustrates another important issue--the amount of change expected of teachers. Change is time-consuming and hard work. In small schools like Westside, there are fewer staff to carry out the same number of responsibilities which are supported by a range of specialists in larger schools. Parents and teacher assistants pointed out the number of additional demands, besides the grant activities, that staff have dealt with: a drug awareness program, the visiting planetarium, the swimming program, annual testing, the development of a new Talented and Gifted program, a state standardization visit, the death of a student, the outdoor school for the fifth grade, and fifth grade graduation. All of these activities were added to the regularly scheduled curriculum.

Summary

Nearly everyone interviewed at the Westside School believed that a good school could become even better. For this to happen, openness and trust, where everyone's opinion was valued, would need to be developed. Many people felt the school was moving in that direction, but barriers remained: time, opportunities to focus on individual staff

concerns, and poor interpersonal communications on the part of some staff. In short, school personnel had become polarized between those who wanted change and those who were cautious or reticent to change.

The principal and his vision for the school were viewed skeptically by staff who had seen a succession of principals at Westside over the past 10 years. In addition, the principal's communication style tended to be too task-focused and led many staff to feel they were not valued. In many ways, the rate and amount of change being emphasized led long time personnel to feel their past efforts and successes in the school did not count in the new scheme of things. Fortunately, the principal appeared to recognize these staff concerns. Restructured staff meetings, new communication strategies, and responsiveness toward teacher curriculum needs were viewed positively by the majority of staff and community people interviewed.

Making Sense of the Eastside and Westside Staff Renewal Efforts

Differences between the Eastside and Westside schools help to magnify the issues and problems regarding professional renewal. Eastside School appeared to have more obstacles on its path toward successful development than did Westside School. Geographic isolation, declining enrollment, complex grade configurations (i.e., K-12 predominantly multigraded organization) and minimal resources distinguish it. Westside, on the other hand, was located close to a metropolitan center where resources were readily available from a university and education service center. The school also had a staff development grant that outlined a plan of action and provided the resources for implementation. At Westside School, though, there remained a residue of conflict and tension. The climate in both schools appeared to inhibit professional renewal to differing degrees. Eastside was at a standstill while Westside was making positive movement.

Table 3 presents a comparison of the two schools using the four dimensions of effective staff development presented earlier. These four categories are neither absolute nor inclusive of all variables associated with successful professional growth, renewal, and staff development. What they do provide is an explanatory lens through which to compare and contrast the two schools, thereby helping enlarge our understanding.

On every dimension, Eastside School received a negative response. Westside School received qualified responses in three areas, "Leadership," School Climate," and "Staff Ownership." The first area reflects support from the current principal but also the lack of long-term support because of continuous administrative turnover. "Climate" also received a negative response, a reflection of poor communications and conflict in the school. Lastly, the Westside princpal demonstrated the importance of developing staff ownership. However, he was only beginning to understand the importance of considering the characteristics of the more experienced and mature school staff.

Table 3. A Comparison of Professional Renewal Issues Between the Eastside and Westside Schools

Dimension	Eastside School	Westside School
Defined Needs:		
• staff development program based on clearly defined needs	needs felt, but no consensus or program	need identified, successful grant application
• integration of individual goals and district goals	strong conflict evident with goals unclear	conflict evident as well as goals clearly articulated
Leadership:		
• sustained administrative support	currently - no historically - no	currently - yes historically - no
• encourage teacher leadership	no	yes, required by the grant
• principal participates in activities with the staff	yes, during school improvement training	yes, during school improvement training
School Climate:		
• consideration given to community norms/values	not evident	some in terms of parent involvement activities
• communication clear, open and credible among administration, staff and community	no, much evidence of failed communications	improving, with some evidence of failed communications
• participant opportunity to try new practice and behavior, exchange ideas, and receive helpful feedback	no evidence, poor climate supporting teacher change, as well as low staff morale	some evidence based on staff development grant activities, but also evidence of conflict and low morale
Staff Ownership:		
• staff involved in selecting renewal goals and school changes that will be addressed	no, some effort made in school improvement training	yes, in staff development grant and school improvement activities
• incentives identified	not evident	yes, sharing sessions
• time to work on staff renewal and assimilate new learnings	evidence could be available, but lack of goals and low staff morale negate opportunity	yes, time built into grant
• consider maturity and experience of the staff	issue discredited	some awareness, but importance not understood

Ironically, the two schools were different on nearly every dimension except one. Yet both schools demonstrated a similar problem: administrators and teachers felt staff development and renewal were seriously constrained. Reasons may lie in the two dimensions the schools had in common (i.e., Leadership and School Climate). School-level variables relating to these areas may be powerful determinants associated with successful professional growth and renewal.

What variables may contribute to the resistance to change and professional renewal found in the two schools? First, change, as Fullan (1982) has pointed out, is not the new program or strategy: it is the people who must implement the change. How an individual teacher changes or adapts to an innovation relates to how he or she answers several key questions within themselves:

> Will the change make a difference for students?
>
> Is the change possible in this environment?
>
> Can I be successful with the change?

Teachers with the longest history in a school may be the most skeptical and resistant to change because their answer to most of these questions is "no." For example, if repeated attempts to gain support for a new idea or practice fail, a teacher may simply give up trying. In addition, teachers may have developed instructional routines that work well with students. Such teachers may ask themselves, "What difference could a change make that would justify the extra time and effort?" Such concerns appeared to be the case with senior teachers at both schools. They seemed to be the most reticent toward change.

Frequent administrative turnover can lead to inadequate communication and staff mistrust. In addition, turnover generally requires teachers and other school personnel to assume many of the responsibilities associated with a school administrator. Often, a new administrator brings new programs and ideas that the teaching staff may not clearly agree to or understand. Some staff may take proposed changes personally. "Why would anyone want me to try this new idea unless they felt that what I am currently doing is bad?" These feelings can lead to resistance to trying anything new.

Over time, those teachers who weather the administrative turnover develop strategies for surviving the transitions and the onslaught of new suggestions. They learn how to reduce the disruptions brought about by the changes to the instructional routines that have worked for them. In many small, rural schools these strategies may take numerous forms:

- Passively ignore the new ideas and they will slowly fade
- Actively resist new ideas by winning staff and/or community support

- Propose alternative ideas and gain support from staff
- Act as if you are using the new idea, but continue as before
- All staff work together to review student performance, establish goals, and develop strategies for meeting those needs

Generally, the most productive strategy is the last one. Unfortunately, in many small, rural schools, the history of administrative turnover, poor communication, and lack of trust on the part of all staff, reduce the potential for the last strategy to be successful. From the new administrator's perspective, teachers appear resistant to change, and even unfriendly. Each new administrator inherits the credibility problems of past administrators. From the teachers' point of view, the new administrator threatens well-established routines. To win staff support, the new administrator must provide leadership which demonstrates trust, support, and a resolve to work together to provide the best education possible for students. However, if the administrator is just "biding his time" until something better comes along, which was the view of several Westside staff, then issues of trust and credibility are compounded. This is a key reason why research on effective school change suggests a minimum of three years for an innovation to "take hold."

RURAL DIVERSITY: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ISOLATION

To overcome professional isolation and increase staff participation in renewal efforts, we must understand the differences between rural schools and communities and metropolitan America. Gjelten (1978), an educator with extensive rural school experience, highlights these differences when he says:

> [Rural] Teachers are in a conspicuous position in the community, and while the attention is enjoyable, the lack of privacy may lead to feelings of vulnerability; the personalized atmosphere at school meant everyone was more affected by the pendular swing of morale; the lack of materials and facilities encountered by all small schools was often frustrating; and our separation from other schools and other teachers made it easier for us to lose perspective on our work. (p. 3)

Gjelten's focus has been on the school characteristics of a rural setting. When attention is shifted to the rural community, these rural-urban differences become even more complex, reflecting differences in shared values and beliefs. This rural cultural context presents the greatest challenge for teachers in isolated communities, and may well be a major cause for teacher turnover.

Table 4 provides a list of rural school characteristics drawn from the research literature (Miller, 1988). These have been organized into three distinct but interrelated groups

Table 4. Factors Unique to Rural, Small Schools

Classroom Factors
Classes are often made up of more than one grade level
Often the student-teacher ratio is smaller
Teachers typically have three to five different preparations daily
Teachers often teach classes in areas in which they are not prepared
Limited and/or dated equipment, instructional materials and supplies
Limited information resources (media and library related)
Lack of support for dealing with special needs children
School Factors
Greater emphasis placed on informal and personal communications
Teachers often responsible for extensive administrative, supervisory, extracurricular, and maintenance responsibilities
Junior and senior high schools are often combined
Limited resources (supplies and materials outdated)
Teachers are more isolated from ongoing staff development
Little or no systematic inservice or staff development program
Limited professional development information
Fewer defined rules and policies (a more informal administrative style)
Lower salaries
Teachers are the sole grade level or department representative
Socio-Cultural Factors
Greater emphasis placed on informal and personal communications
Difficulty in finding adequate housing
Difficulty in buying and selling property
Private lives more open to scrutiny
Cultural and geographical isolation and/or cultural/linguistic isolation
Services, such as medical and shopping, may be quite distant
High parental expectations for involvement in community activities
Loneliness of trying to fit into an often close-knit community
Adjustment to extreme weather conditions

(adapted from Miller, 1988, p. 3)

(classroom, school, and socio-cultural factors) that impact upon a teacher's ability to succeed and survive in a rural community.

Classroom Related Factors

In small, rural schools, teachers may find themselves in the enviable position of having a smaller class size than a teacher in an urban district. Teachers in a one-room elementary school may teach students from several grade levels. For example, a district may choose to combine grades 3 and 4 because of low enrollment. This creates a unique and demanding situation that many teachers are not prepared to handle. At the high school level, similar situations exist. Teachers may be called upon to teach outside their subject area, or to teach a class with both junior and senior high students. Further, they may be the only teacher in their grade level or department, eliminating the opportunity for to discuss subject matter or others issues with peers.

Resources may also be limited. Teachers often contend with limited and/or dated equipment and curriculum materials. They have to learn to be flexible and creative, using available resources in the school and community (tasks and behavior often not addressed in preservice education). By contrast, the urban/suburban teacher often can call upon psychologists, counselors, curriculum specialists, and other support staff. The rural school teacher, especially those teaching in one- and two-room schools, must function in these multiple roles. Some states, such as Oregon and Washington, provide direct support to rural schools through educational service districts, thus reducing the demands on rural school teachers. In other Northwest states, educators have formed groups such as the League of Schools and the Clearwater Staff Development Consortia in Idaho and the Big Sky Telegraph in Montana.

School Related Factors

Schools often serve as the center of events in small, rural communities. Parents and community members expect that the school will offer all types of athletics, provide space for the 4-H club and the Boy/Girl Scouts, and be available for various community service activities. The supervision of these community events usually falls to school personnel.

As a result, teachers are expected to assume extracurricular duties, and administrators are expected to make sure buildings are secure and that all events run smoothly. The chances for school-community conflict run high, especially when school budgets cannot compensate personnel for the extra time they put in. In addition, in districts consisting of only one or two classrooms, teachers must assume a wide range of responsibilities. They may carry out the duties of the principal, conduct all school supervision, and serve as the janitor. If teachers are unprepared for such responsibilities, they are likely to be sorely disillusioned.

Resources for teacher salaries and staff development are frequently limited. Teachers find fewer opportunities for exposure to current educational trends and/or ongoing staff development that directly relate to their unique teaching situations. It is not uncommon, for example, to find these schools without a professional library of teacher resources, or an instructional improvement program linked to school goals.

But working in small, rural schools does have its advantages: smaller class size, a more informal social climate, and fewer discipline problems. The important point here is that teachers be aware of the differences between small, rural settings and urban and suburban environments. These differences manifest themselves in a variety of ways and result in differing roles and expectations for teachers.

Socio-Cultural Factors

Jonathan Sher (1977), a long-time rural educator, believes that vast differences exist between rural communities:

> Rural America may well represent the single most diverse and heterogeneous group of individuals and communities in our society. The island village off the coast of Maine, a coal mining town in West Virginia, a ranching area in Wyoming, a college town in Minnesota, an impoverished community in the Mississippi Delta region, a ski-resort section of Vermont, a migrant-worker settlement in Texas, an Alaskan Native village near the Arctic circle, and a prosperous grain-farming area in Iowa have little in common except that they are all classified as rural areas of the United States. (p. 31)

This view of the diversity of rural America has been substantiated on more quantitative grounds in terms of educational attainment, level of family income, type of industry, and economic base (see Bender, 1985).

If one surveys a map of the United States in terms of ethnic populations, this diversity becomes even more extreme. In Montana alone, there are more than five different Native American populations living in rural environments, speaking different languages, and having different historical/cultural traditions. Often these minority students do not come to school with the cultural and linguistic patterns found in the mainstream culture. This generally places them "at risk." In a similar manner, because teachers do not come to these communities with the cultural awareness and knowledge of community members, it usually places the teachers "at risk," as well. As a result, teacher turnover in these settings tends to be very high (Grubis, 1985).

Many standard teaching practices, successful when applied to the majority culture, are not effective with the educationally at-risk minority-culture student. Unfortunately, schools with heavy enrollments of underachieving minorities cannot retain their teachers, who often quickly transfer to "middle-class" schools. This is no doubt due to teachers'

frustration with the lack of success in their classrooms, and the frequent misunderstandings and irritations too often encountered when working in a culture different than one's own. In an analogous manner, a metropolitan teacher working for the first time in a rural setting may also experience the environment as culturally different.

When working in a rural community that is culturally different than one's own, the characteristics that make that school and community unique need to be understood. More than simply understanding, educators need to develop the sensitivity and skills to help them succeed in rural communities. Again, Gjelten's comments (1978) are insightful:

> It is important to see this whole scene, because of the most characteristic feature of the rural experience is the interconnectedness throughout it. To be a successful teacher in a rural community requires integration of personal cultural, profession, and social dimensions. (p. 6)

Knowing these unique characteristics, one needs to ask, "In what ways do rural communities interact with their schools to enhance or constrain the educational process, especially professional renewal?" The next section will focus on this question, describing the relationship between school and community and how they interact with each other.

Rural Community Influence

Rural communities influence their schools in important and often indirect ways. Capper (1991) reviewed the research literature on rural community influences and identified two separate, but interrelated sets of influential characteristics which she calls structural and cultural. Structural characteristics include geographic isolation, small size, lack of bureaucratic layers, integrated roles (i.e. ,"wear many different hats"), and informal communication. This produces school-community relations that are tightly bound to one another. One illustration of this connectedness can be found in the many school personnel who also are community members. These structural characteristics help differentiate rural from metropolitan areas. Rural communities need their schools for much more than education. Schools become the center of the community, defining its identity, serving as a source of entertainment, and helping the community remain viable.

In contrast, schools in large urban communities often are characterized by bureaucratic layers, formal channels of communication and well-defined, discrete roles. The school and the community are insulated from each other. Teachers can come to work, teach, and attend staff development activities with minimal community awareness. In a small rural community, a staff development activity may raise questions from community residents who want to know why teachers were out of their classrooms. This brings us to Capper's second set of characteristics, which she calls cultural.

Culture reflects the norms or shared beliefs of people. It's what binds a community and gives it an identity. Included in Capper's (1991) list of cultural elements are such things as values, time, history, dichotomy between locals and outsiders, and socioeconomic status. Several illustrations help clarify the importance and the interrelatedness of these cultural elements.

At the Westside School, the new principal did not initially understand the importance local history and values played in his efforts to bring about change. In his first year at the school, he and the staff participated in a school improvement program. In addition, he wrote and received a staff development grant aimed at improving instruction. The principal was wise enough to involve school personnel in identifying needs to address in the school improvement process and the staff development grant. However, he did not take sufficient time to learn about the staff and the community, their values, and the history which contributed to those values.

The principal's lack of local knowledge and insight appeared to create ill feelings among staff who felt the new improvement efforts discounted what they had been doing for years. The lack of sensitivity to local culture was felt in the community, as well. One parent said she liked the way the beautification project improved the looks of the school, but she did not like the change of tone in the school: "The principal needs to model humor and fun. He is not real personal; he doesn't laugh." Parents and many school personnel had a history characterized by convivial relations and humor. Parents also mentioned frequent changes which led to "a low level of energy and motivation toward projects." It was not the direction of the change that concerned parents, but the amount, the time, and the impact it appeared to have on traditionally held values.

Structural and cultural factors help define the community and give it identity. An understanding of these factors can provide insight into how the community influences events within the school. Moreover, it can provide information on how the school may influence the community. As Capper (1991) points out, in small, rural communities there is "a reciprocal relationship between communities and schools which can constrain or support school processes (p. 12)." It is this area of reciprocal influence where professional renewal becomes most salient because it not only requires community support for success, but it provides a channel of communication for altering community values regarding education practice.

School and Community Culture and the Process of Change

There are many conditions which promote or inhibit innovation or professional renewal within rural schools. The nature of how a school organization responds to innovation or change in school practice depends largely on the existing school and community culture. Staessens (1991) describes school culture as a socially constructed reality that produces norms of behavior and gives meaning to the organization. In this sense, school culture could be a shared vision regarding the importance of learning, the value of professional

renewal, and the nature of teacher relationships. But, a school culture could also reflect a shared lack of vision.

Recent research on school change conducted by Staessens (1991) provides a framework upon which to understand the relationship between culture and professional renewal. But more important, it describes how cultural meaning is constructed, conveyed, and sustained in order to bring about systemic school renewal and change. Staessens delineates three culture domains in schools: "The principal as builder and carrier of the school culture," "goal consensus," and "professional relationships among the teaching staff (p. 5-6)." It has been argued elsewhere that in the absence of a principal, other responsible individuals can take on leadership roles which influence the direction of change in schools (Gersten & Carnine, 1982; Newberg & Glatthorn, 1983; Miller, 1987).

Principal as Conveyer of Culture

The principal has the opportunity to build and/or modify school culture. What the principal says and does conveys what is important or not important. In Westside and Eastside schools, we learned the impact that principal behavior, communication style, and turnover had on professional staff. The teachers at Eastside felt the principal conveyed a dissatisfaction with instructional practice thereby contributing to a high level of discord. Teachers at Westside felt the principal's brisk, task-focused style conveyed a lack of trust in school personnel. However, he also conveyed a desire for improving his relations by changing his communication practices and encouraging staff collaboration. The principal plays a key role in the climate and culture of the school by the example he models--what is communicated and how it is conveyed, and by actions that support or ignore school goals.

Sharing a Vision

Goal consensus, as described by Staessens (1991), is more than a set of rationally derived goals. Instead, goal consensus reflects deeply held beliefs regarding the purpose or mission of the school. In other words, it reflects what the school and staff believe they are all about. In this sense, it provides motivation and direction for the act of teaching. Staessens (1991) emphasizes that goal consensus is more than a plan that has to be followed. One might consider goal consensus as a norm or common set of values that give the school and staff an identity and shared purpose.

To learn about a school's goal or mission, ask people who work there the following questions:

What do you consider important in the school?
Why is this considered important?
How can I notice this is important?

> How would you characterize your school during a conversation with parents? What exactly makes your school different from other schools?
>
> (Staessens, 1991, p. 5)

Agreement among staff reflects the degree of goal consensus and the magnitude of the school's mission or vision of itself.

Professional Relationship in Schools

The last cultural dimension is professional relationships among the teaching staff. Professional staff construct and convey culture through their communication and cooperation with one another. The process of communication about professional matters creates norms that sustain or inhibit professional change. For example, at the Westside School, senior staff conveyed norms of autonomy and isolation regarding instructional matters through their comments and body language during staff meetings. They indicated an almost active disinterest in the new ideas of their younger colleagues. The message seemed clear: "If you want to try something new, then do it, but don't disrupt routines I have taken years to build."

Three School Cultural Types

Three cultural types of schools were identified in Staessens' (1991) research: "the family school," "the school as a professional organization," and "the living-apart-together school" (p. 13-14). Table 5 provides a comparison of these three cultural types across the three domains. These "cultural types" are not discrete or absolute, but likely exist on a continuum where schools may reflect a central tendency toward one type or another. The Eastside School, for example, appeared to be at the "living-apart-together" stage. In contrast, the Westside School appeared to be in a transitional phase. The new principal began a process of implementing activities designed to develop goal consensus, improve collaboration, and involve staff in decision making. But there also was evidence of a longing for a time when the school was like the "family school."

Of these three types, the "family school," according to Staessens, was most often found in small, rural schools. This seems logical given that the rural community structure and culture emphasize informal and personal communication, self-sufficiency, and a strong support of community. Schmuck and Schmuck's (1990) year-long study of 24 rural districts throughout the United States revealed similar characteristics. They found the majority of teachers they interviewed, especially at the elementary and middle schools, "felt like they belonged to the faculty, identified with the school's norms, and enjoyed teaching and living in a small town" (p. 8). However, they also found "an absence of collaboration and cooperation in small-town schools" (p. 11).

Table 5. A Comparison of Three Types of School Cultures

Cultural Types	Three Dimensions of School Culture		
	Principal as Builder/Carrier	*Goal Consensus*	*Professional Relationships*
School as a Professional Organization	Principal as "architect," with a clear vision of the school's future that focuses on learning and professional growth Communication clearly conveys expectations Norms: being a teacher means continuous improvement, focus on professional matters and an emphasis on working hard	A dynamic "mission" unites the school--a living orientation reflecting continuous redefinition of "Who are we? What is the image of our school? What do we want?" (p. 12) "Critical thinking in consideration of improvement has become self-evident" (p. 12)	Orientation is one of colleagues more than of friends. A pervasive belief that together we can better fulfill the professional task of teaching and learning Teachers are intrinsically motivated and their professional self-image reflects continuous reflection and self-study
Family School	Principal as "Grandfather," where the emphasis is predominantly on personal concerns Spontaneous personal contacts more important and valuable than structures Views teachers as colleagues and defers to their judgment for instructional matters Norms: "good atmosphere permits one to live and work better" (p. 9)	Struggling to survive and maintain the school against the onslaught of declining enrollment and loss of support Slogan, "Even small trees can bear good fruit" (p. 9)	Focus on the number of pupils and the relationship of the school to the community in terms of operational support Climate reflects: "geniality, coziness and love for children" (p. 10)

Table 5. Continued

Cultural Types	Three Dimensions of School Culture		
	Principal as Builder/Carrier	*Goal Consensus*	*Professional Relationships*
Living-Apart-Together School	Principal as "Nonentity:" whether the principal is present or not, really doesn't matter much (p. 14)" School functions from day to day without a clear vision Viewed by teachers as providing little support or appreciation Communicates unclear expectations Motto: "If you leave me alone, then I'll leave you alone, as well" (p. 14) Norm: autonomy and professional isolation	No unifying image or mission among personnel No collective link between activities and future goals Work emphasis is on the individual teacher in the classroom Teachers do not speak in terms of a "team" or the school as a whole	A feeling of unity and cooperation is nearly absent with little professional or personal exchange among teachers. Staff is uninformed about one another's work Few or no structures for daily professional communication Some teachers lament the lack of professional relations and support--they retreat into their classroom or commiserate with a few understanding colleagues

Of the 25 superintendents they interviewed, they only found three who had a vision of leading their staff toward collaborative ways of working. Moreover, they only found 10 schools of the 78 studied where teachers participated in any aspect of decision making.

They found few examples which one could characterize as "schools as professional organizations." Schmuck and Schmuck (1990) suggest that:

> Perhaps educators of our small-town schools are not adept at democratic participation because they are overworked and stuck in routines that keep them from cooperating . . . We saw superintendents not only developing budgets, hiring and firing personnel, working on curriculum, conferring with attorneys, meeting with the board, and attending Rotary, but also driving a bus, attending out-of-town sports events, and directing traffic. We saw principals not only

> supervising teachers, running faculty meetings, dealing with discipline problems, observing classes and hall behavior, and managing school supplies, but also coaching the track team, acting as athletic director, working on bus schedules . . . we even saw one district where the principal had no school secretary! We saw some teachers teaching six or seven hours a day without time for preparation or grading papers, and then spending another two or three hours supervising an extracurricular activity after school. (P. 11)

Clearly, rural characteristics play an important role in determining the types of activities possible within a school. Schmuck and Schmuck's observations closely align with many of the unique factors of rural schools and communities identified in Table 4, (e.g., limited resources, multiple roles, isolation, and small size).

Of the three cultural types of schools, the "school as professional organization" and the "family school" provide the most fertile ground for professional renewal. Norms in the "school as professional organization" support, encourage, and reward professional renewal. In fact, the school's culture, as defined by these norms, demand continuous improvement while sanctioning professional isolation and stagnation (Little, 1982).

The "family school" provides an atmosphere that neither actively supports nor hinders renewal efforts as long as efforts do not produce tension that disrupts the family-like tone of the school. Innovations depend, in such settings, on teacher goodwill. The lack of formal communication structures for sharing professional matters reduces the collegial support often required for sustained change efforts to succeed (Staessens, 1991). This emphasis on a good atmosphere in the "family school" can be seen in the positive comments describing the Westside School (e.g., "great school," "small and personal," and "warm and caring staff").

A majority of the Westside personnel made a point during interviews to emphasize the importance of everyone being friendly. However, many teachers also emphasized instruction and the improvement of professional relations in the school. The primary grade teachers were outspoken, voicing strong concern regarding the need for professional growth, collaborative planning, and the coordination of curriculum. They also conveyed a desire and need to change so that the school would become a place where students more fully enjoyed learning. The new principal shared a similar vision. Primary-grade teachers shared concrete examples of the need for change such as "more time for cross-grade planning in whole language," "teachers need help in moving from hands-on concrete learning to more abstract learning," and "develop school-wide interest grouped activities." Interestingly, they felt change was constrained by the upper-grade teachers and not the principal. One primary grade teacher summarized the groups views:

> We are divided between primary and intermediate. Some reasons are that people don't want to change. In some ways, things have improved, but when it comes to facing a problem such as making changes in math, 'it has always been done this

way,' 'we have no time, no extra pay, etc.' For example, common math time was agreed upon, but now two rooms [upper grades] have stopped.

From the perspective of the upper-grade teachers, many school problems were created by the principal who they said needs to "accentuate the positive and act more informally." When asked about professional renewal needs, their attention centered around "change going too fast," "curriculum tied to time, no prep time," "more grammar," and "advanced kids not getting their fair share . . . need to ability group." Few of their suggestions for professional renewal required changes in practice or collaboration with colleagues.

The principal's instructional vision for the Westside School faces a rough road. Many of his expectations contradict the prevailing norms of isolation and autonomy as reflected in the attitudes of the veteran and senior staff. He was viewed as "driven by a university orientation, not school-teacher needs;" an outsider trying to overstructure communication and school activities. However, those who shared his vision, voiced positive regard for the opportunity for collaborative planning and felt thwarted in their efforts to push the school forward by the "senior staff." If the principal stays in the school and continues to support his vision through word and deed, a strong goal consensus could emerge. However, if the Westside School principal leaves for another position, the upper-grade teachers' skepticism about change will be reinforced. One can predict a school culture reverting to norms of isolation and autonomy, where some staff continue to grow while others continue their jobs from 8 to 3:30.

If the Westside School illustrates a rural school in a state of transition between the "family-school" and the "school-as-professional organization," then how might the Eastside School be characterized? Eastside might be viewed as a classic case of a "living together-apart-school." The superintendent/principal conveyed a vision of a school where students were motivated to learn and teachers engaged in the professional renewal he felt they needed. His style of leadership and communication, coupled with a history of administrative turnover, helped contribute to an unhealthy school culture. Low staff morale and time constraints led teachers to retreat into their classrooms. One teacher, considered to be the best by students, resigned at the end of the school year. Given these conditions, professional renewal had come to a virtual standstill. Like the senior staff at the Westside School, senior staff at Eastside resisted change in ways that negatively influenced the school climate. The prognosis for developing a school culture supportive of professional renewal appeared bleak.

The positive changes at Westside School may be related to those factors that differentiate it from the Eastside School. These include its close proximity to resources such as a university and a local educational service agency, a more effective principal, and a family-like atmosphere upon which to build change.

Summary

In this section, the importance of understanding the unique and diverse nature of rural schools and communities as factors which enhance or impede efforts at professional renewal were described. Classroom, school and socio-cultural factors were presented along with an overview of ways the community influences the school. It was shown that structural characteristics (e.g., geographic location, size, minimal bureaucratic structure, integrated roles, etc.) and cultural characteristics (e.g. values, time, community history, etc.) of the community create an identity that influences the change process in the school.

A framework for viewing the relationship between change and school culture was then described from the perspective of the school. In this framework, the importance of three cultural dimensions were described: 1) principal's role as conveyer of culture, 2) vision or goal consensus among staff, and 3) professional relationships. Three cultural types found in schools were reported in terms of these dimensions. They were the "School as a Professional Organization," "Family School," and the "Living-Apart-Together School." The Westside School was viewed as in transition from the "Family School" to the "School as a Professional Organization." The Eastside School, on the the other hand, was seen as fitting into the "Living-Apart-Together School." In general, because of their unique characteristics, rural schools were portrayed as fitting into the "Family School."

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The discussion of professional renewal in small, rural schools began with an analysis of data from a series of rural education forums conducted in four Northwest states. This resulted in a broad portrayal of professional development needs, issues and strategies. Professional renewal was viewed as vital to rural schools. However, many factors present constraints that must be overcome if small, rural schools are to be successful in efforts at staff renewal and development. These factors include geographic and professional isolation, limited fiscal resources, time demands, community attitudes, and the availability of relevant professional development opportunities.

A review of the research on professional renewal identified a limited body of information specifically focused on rural schools. However, available rural research and research drawn from metropolitan settings suggested general guidelines deemed essential for implementing professional renewal opportunities. Identifying needs, providing leadership, creating a school climate conducive to change, and developing staff ownership were found to be important elements for successful professional renewal. Using these elements as an interpretive framework for examining the perceptions of key stakeholders from two small, rural schools, it was found that school climate clearly played a primary role in inhibiting or facilitating staff renewal and change. Developing a school culture of trust and support may be the first order of business for professional renewal (see Gottfredson, 1987).

Developing the norms required for sustained professional renewal require time, stability and leadership. At the Westside and Eastside Schools, administrative turnover affected school climate and staff readiness to engage in change. Some school personnel suggested that the Eastside School could not afford the salary of a top-notch administrator. Past administrators at Westside were viewed as using the school as a career "stepping stone" until something better came along.

As a result of frequent administrative turnover, teachers at both schools became prudent observers of new administrators and grew especially resistant to new ideas. To overcome school staff caution and reticence, administrators must be sensitive and skilled communicators, aware of school personnel and their history. This need was illustrated at both schools where the administrators, in promoting an agenda for change, appeared to not recognize the importance of staff history and ownership in the school, especially of veteran staff. This appeared to compound teacher resistance to change, even though needed changes in instructional practices were described by nearly everyone interviewed.

In addition, administrative skill as a communicator directly impacted the school climate. For example, at the Eastside School, the superintendent/principal's poor communication skills played a primary role in the conflict at the school. Although the Westside principal appeared to have communication and leadership problems of his own, positive changes were occurring. In his case, some of the problems may have been related to his inexperience in rural schools and communities. Interview comments such as "he was too task-focused" and "he overly structures meetings" indicate that the principal operated from a mainstream school model where communications are more formal. Once apprised of staff concerns, the principal modified his style, and staff commented about positive changes in staff meetings and communications.

It was also found that beside the administrator, individual staff personalities have a powerful influence on school climate. In a small school, these personalities have a much greater influence on events than they would in a large school. At both Eastside and Westside schools, senior staff wielded considerable influence on the school culture. At the Westside School, for example, the older, long-time teachers appeared to bring renewal efforts to a standstill.

What implications for the development of norms conducive to professional renewal and change can be drawn from the information presented? First, administrative leadership plays an important part in creating school norms conducive to professional renewal and staff development. Variables that must be considered in bringing about norms supportive of change include:

- An understanding of the history of the school, staff and community
- Sensitivity to the unique characteristics of rural schools and communities

- An understanding of the developmental/career stages of school personnel
- Recognition of the central role communication style plays in developing support and trust
- Recognition that the way people deal with change relates to their experiences, feelings of ownership, time, and, above all, the school climate in which the change takes place

Developing the norms required for sustained professional renewal also requires the ability to learn about community values and utilize that knowledge in developing a support base upon which to build professional renewal efforts. Of primary importance to this understanding is a recognition of the complex and interrelated nature of the school's culture, the structure and culture of the community within which the school is situated and the type of professional renewal (innovation and change) desired.

Figure 1 provides a way to visualize the relationship among school culture, the culture the innovation requires to flourish, and the culture of the community. The ideal school culture might look like that found in the "school-as-professional organization," where norms of continuous improvement regarding professional practice and growth predominate. In this school as professional organization, there is a fit among the school culture, the innovation, and community values. This alignment reflects a school-wide set of values that are consistent with values the community holds toward learning and the outcomes of schooling. The innovation reflects these school-community beliefs in terms of the changes brought about in the school. Conditions supporting the development of such a culture vary greatly. Administrative and teacher turnover, isolation from professional development resources, time constraints, and a failure of preservice training and staff development opportunities to address the unique realities of rural schools hinder the development of professional cultures.

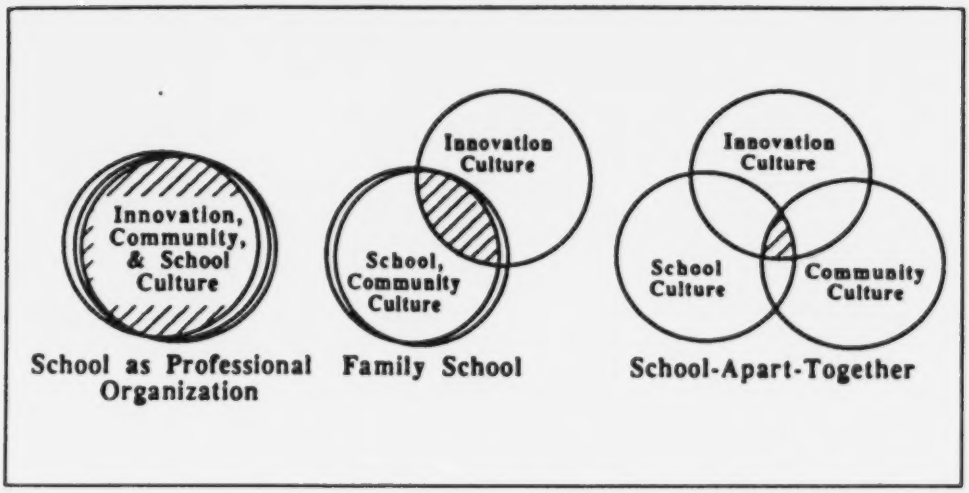
The "family school" illustrates a close fit between community values and school values. The cultural emphasis is on sustaining positive relations through ongoing internal communication. The prevailing norm is getting along. A portion of the staff may engage in professional renewal, but gaining school-wide consensus regarding the direction and type of professional renewal is difficult without sustained, consistent leadership and a collaborative professional culture to support change efforts. A "family school" culture may not be sufficient for bringing about school-wide change.

The "living-together-apart school" can be seen as a misalignment among school, innovation, and community culture. Professional renewal often occurs individually in isolation. The intersection of school, innovation, and community reflects individuals improving their practice, but no one else in the school may know what is occurring. However, the renewal activity likely fits within the community norms.

Several areas help determine a school's ability to sustain professional renewal, including:

- The type and level of goal consensus regarding the purposes of schooling among staff and community. The greater the consensus about the outcomes of instruction, the more likely renewal will be sustained.

Figure 1. A Comparison of the Three Culture School Types



- The nature of relationships among professionals in the school. Relationships built around professional practice are more likely to sustain renewal than ones built around interpersonal regard and "getting along."

- The nature and continuity of leadership in the school. The presence of sustained leadership of a school vision that supports and values professional growth to attain ever increasing positive outcomes for students and staff.

A school culture consisting of strong goal consensus focused on learning, staff relationships built around professional practice, and consistent and supportive leadership conveys a message that the school's culture provides a positive environment for professional renewal.

Recognition of these three dimensions of school culture provides a starting point upon which to build professional renewal. To assess one's school in terms of these three dimensions may be the second step needed. A third step requires developing a common understanding of the the kind of environment most conducive to student and staff learning. To assist those interested in developing a greater understanding of professional

development issues within rural schools and communities, the key issues emerging from this report have been condensed and summarized under five headings. In addition, professional development programs and strategies which reflect many of the ideas and issues presented in this report are summarized in the following section *Illustrative Rural Staff Development Strategies and Programs*.

Developing an Understanding of Norms Supportive of Professional Renewal in Small, Rural Schools

Small, Rural Schools are Unique

- School-community relations are tightly bound to one another, placing schools at the center of the community, defining its identity, serving as a source of entertainment, and helping the community remain viable.
- Professional renewal activities must be practical and valued, reflecting a consideration for the scarcity of time.
- The most relevant sources for staff development may well be rural educators themselves: class visitations, school networks, rural school conferences, etc.

Change Comes From the Inside

- Change is generally acknowledged as discomforting. Involving staff in helping to identify professional renewal needs and strategies can reduce this discomfort.
- Individual readiness for change is determined by years of teaching, age, experience, self-confidence, professional commitment, and school norms.
- Past experiences, feelings of ownership, time, and above all, the school climate in which the change takes place determines how a person approaches change.
- It is vital to provide an emotional and technically-supported environment during the change process.
- Change is a process occurring within people and often leads people to ask the following questions:

    a. Will the change make a positive difference in student learning and attitudes?

b. Is the change possible in this environment (i.e., ongoing support, incentives, community acceptance)?

c. Can I be successful with the change (i.e., the belief and ability to change and learn new skills)?

Leadership Must Grow From Understanding

- Someone must provide consistent and stable community supported leadership, and further, that person must actively facilitate norms supportive of change.
- Adequate time should be spent learning about the school and the community by asking questions of the people who live and work there. Questions should include gathering information about the school and community, its history, previous educational change experiences, and past educational achievements, values, economics, parent involvement, school and community politics, and key community leaders.
- The principal, supervising teacher, and superintendent play a key role in the climate and culture of the school by the example he/she models.

Incentives Are Crucial

- There must be incentives to change.
- Possible incentives include providing time, resources, college and/or certification renewal credit, and peer interaction.
- It is important to praise wherever possible and to recognize progress and small successes along the way.
- The opportunity and encouragement to work with a valued colleague can be a powerful incentive to motivate staff involvement.

Renewal Must be Continuous and Collaborative

- There must be an ongoing positive press for professional renewal based on clearly identified student and professional needs of school personnel. However, renewal must be focused, balancing teacher needs and school goals.
- Decisions regarding the types and sophistication of change need to consider staff turnover.

- Effort must be made to create opportunities for school staff to discuss professional matters relating to instruction and to share, discuss and modify changing practices with colleagues in supportive and non-threatening ways.

Illustrative Rural Staff Development Strategies and Programs

In reviewing the literature, professional renewal strategies were selected which addressed insights growing from three areas. First, the professional renewal issues and concerns that emerged from analysis of state rural forum data. Secondly, the importance of school/community climate and interrelationships as identified in the case study interviews. Lastly, examples were selected that avoided all or most of the problems described by Fullan (1982).

A matrix (Table 6) was developed identifying representative approaches and strategies to reflect the unique needs of small, rural schools seeking professional renewal. Categories such as writing process, field experience, and administrative leadership, were used to organize the various approaches and are not meant to be exhaustive. Many effective rural staff development activities were discovered. However, the limited research in rural education limits their visibility. The matrix was designed as a guide, a way of thinking about issues related to professional renewal in rural and isolated schools.

Strategies were marked for any given approach if they were explicitly described in the reports. This does not mean that additional strategies were not employed. For example, "networking" or "leadership roles" were not marked for the "field experience" approach. However, the field experience program (described in detail later in the report) appears to provide a network for teachers, prospective teachers, and university faculty, including opportunities for studenet participants to assume leadership roles.

Even though reflection is an integral part of staff development approaches that emphasize the recognition of development differences, it has been placed as a separate strategy in order to highlight its importance. In addition, some of the general approaches specifically addressed reflective practice in their design. Reflective strategies allow participants to reflect on ideas and processes. The participant then develops and in-depth understanding. For example, journal writing is a reflective strategy because it inspires reflective thought through the reading and discussion of journal entries. Developmental strategies accommodate variation in teacher learning styles, experience, abilities, and maturity. Learning, understanding, and applying new teaching practices vary widely. Approaches that incorporate developmental strategies meet the individual needs of teachers and increase the possibility of successful change.

Participant planning, collaboration, and leadership roles were strategies most often employed. These were followed by networking and institutes, seminars and classes. Each strategy addresses the importance of overcoming isolation for professional renewal. Activities such as participant planning encourage personal interation. Networking and telecommunications create opportunities for interaction that extend to other districts, state and educational services, and national programs.

Table 6. An Overview of Selected Rural Professional Renewal Approaches

APPROACHES	STRATEGIES: Participant Planning	Networking	Collaboration	Institutes, Seminars, & Classes	Follow-up	Developmental	Reflective	Leadership Roles	Incentives
I. Writing Process									
Training Rural Teachers To Implement Writing Process Instruction: A Concerns-Based Approach	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
II. Field Experience									
A Model For A Rural School Field Experience	●		●	●			●		●
Teacher Education at Western Montana College of the University of Montana: A Distinctive Program Preparing Teachers for Rural Montana Schools	●		●	●	●				
III. Professional Reading Groups									
Staff Development Through Professional Reading and Discussion	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Conditions Affecting The Restructuring Of Rural Secondary Schools	●		●		●	●	●	●	
IV. Telecommunications									
Using Instructional Television To Support Beginning Teachers In Rural Isolated Communities			●	●	●			●	
V. Administrative Leadership									
Native Administrators In Rural Schools	●	●	●	●				●	●
VI. Networks									
Alaska Staff Development Network: Working Together To Make Schools Better	●	●	●	●				●	
Maine's Support Network For Rural Special Educators	●	●	●	●					

Programs and Approaches

Writing Process

Training Rural Teachers To Implement Writing Process Instruction: A Concerns-Based Approach

Stroble, Elizabeth
Bratcher, Suzanne
April 1990 AERA presentation

The National Writing Project developed an inservice program centering around writing across the curriculum as a powerful renewal tool. The program uses the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) as a framework for accommodating the developmental differences among teachers. The model addresses the fact that learners go through levels of awareness in learning to implement the new teaching practice. If the staff developer and learner are both aware of the CBAM levels, they will understand the needs and anxieties that each level presents, thereby developing appropriate interventions personalized to individual teacher needs.

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) describes the changing feelings of teachers and administrators as they adopt new practices. The model defines seven stages of concern. Loucks-Horsley and Herbert (1985, p. xi) define the stages of concern and how individuals may express their concerns:

Stages of Concern		Expressions of Concern
6	Refocusing	I have some ideas about something that would work even better.
5	Collaboration	I am concerned about relating what I am doing with what other instructors are doing.
4	Consequence	How is my use of new teaching practices affecting kids?
3	Management	I seem to be spending all my time getting material ready.
2	Personal	How will using a new practice affect me?
1	Informational	I would like to know more about it.
0	Awareness	I am not concerned about it (the innovation).

When this model is used in a program, participants can plan ahead on how those concerns will be addressed and increase the probability of success. Most importantly, by incorporating CBAM, the writing process model focuses on the people involved in the change process.

A consortium of 141 local writing projects in 44 states make up the National Writing Project. At each writing project site, a partnership is developed between a university and local public schools. Each university serves as the site of a five-week summer institute for K-12 teachers selected to attend. Teachers have an opportunity to learn current trends and research on successful writing strategies. They also can share writing strategies they have developed in their own classrooms. A team effort between instructor and students develops what Stroble and Bratcher (1990) believe makes learning more effective. Participants are also trained to conduct staff development in their home districts which encourages schoolwide renewal through writing.

Stroble, Bratcher, and Delp implemented a writing project in Northern Arizona (NAWP) in 1988. During the formation of the NAWP, two common characteristics of successful staff development models were kept in mind: change is gradual, difficult process and continued support is imperative. In 1990, Stroble and Bratcher evaluated the effectiveness of the National Writing Project model for a rural setting. The objectives focused on the teachers' concerns about the writing process before the institute, how well the institute prepared teachers in adopting the process, any change in concerns after the institute, and the degree in which teachers had applied the writing process during the first year following the Institute. The study observed and tested two groups of first through 12th grade teachers with an average of ten years teaching experience.

Results of the study indicated that both groups progressed from a lower level of needing information (CBAM level 1, informational) to a higher level of needing to collaborate (level 5). The study also indicated growth in the teachers use of innovation in the writing process model. According to Stroble and Bratcher (1990), "Many of the teachers in both groups have moved from isolated rudimentary forms of journaling, brainstorming, or freewriting to relatively sophisticated experiments with varied audiences and purposes for writing." Some shortages did exist in the teachers' abilities in the "development and ordering of ideas, assisting students with linguistic choices, and revision practices" (p. 10).

The writing project model addresses the unique needs of rural teachers for several reasons. First, it emphasises the training of trainers approach. When a teacher or administrator leaves a school, the remaining teachers can train new staff in the writing process. Secondly, it provides a network for teachers from various schools through a five-week summer institute. Teachers can exchange ideas, discuss common concerns, and reduce the professional isolation associated with rural teaching. The writing process model addressed a key concern raised by NWREL Rural Education Forum participants

who said that rural teachers often feel "stuck in the woods" or "comfortable with the status quo".

Rural teachers voice concern that staff development often occurs as a one-time shot without any follow-up or help in the implementation of new learning practices. The writing process model gives rural teachers the skills to continue the process. Teachers use the model writing skills to increase teaching effectiveness and writing skills across the curriculum while continually participating in improving their own skills. The workshop developed a network among participating teachers that will help sustain, in a non-threatening and supportive relationship, future professional development opportunities.

Outcomes:

- Developed desire to collaborate among participants
- Networking through five-week summer institute
- Growth in the uses of innovation in components of the writing process model
- Movement of many teachers from isolated rudimentary forms of journal writing, brainstorming, or freewriting to relatively sophisticated experiments with varied audiences and purposes for writing
- Process is ongoing

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Field Experience

A Model For A Rural School Field Experience

Hull, Ray
Hegtvedt, Kathryn
1979 (ED 175 598)

A new teacher has a high likelihood of being placed in a rural school. Most university undergraduate teaching programs do not prepare students for this type of environment. Programs are developed around metropolitan school models and do not address such issues as multigrade classrooms, extracurricular demands, and lack of resources. The University of Oregon (U of O) developed a model that allows undergraduate education students to have an intensive three days of classroom experience in a rural school. At the same time, the rural classroom teachers were released for an inservice.

Oregon's model was based on a Brigham Young University practicum that also exposed undergraduate education students to teaching in rural schools. The U of O expanded the Brigham Young model by requiring that the student prepare a full day of instruction, providing an inservice component for the rural school teachers, and inviting practicum student teachers to stay with local community high school faculty.

Students selected to participate were enrolled in a teaching strategies course. In the five weeks prior to the exchange, students prepared lesson plans based on course work objectives. In addition, university faculty and graduate students met with the rural school administrators and faculty to discuss scheduling and class assignments. The university students corresponded with the rural teachers to clarify teaching assignments and classroom responsibilities.

The inservice component was conducted by university graduate students involved in a series of courses aimed at developing skills in the design and delivery of teacher inservice. Developing an inservice program to meet the needs of rural teachers allowed the graduate students to understand the diversity of rural schools.

Practicum students used classroom teaching techniques such as "active involvement" which were also included in the inservice program. They also used lecturer, discussion, and demonstration techniques. In addition to teaching four to five classes a day, practicum students corrected assignments and coached while getting to know each other, their hosts, and the qualities of a small community.

Students were required to keep a journal documenting their experience and to complete a questionnaire. Students were also required to complete an attitude survey prior to and after the experience. Results indicated university students felt positive about their rural teaching experience. In addition, their opinions of rural schools and students grew more

positive. In the case of at least three students, the experience helped them discover that teaching was not a profession they wanted to pursue.

For many of the university students--even those who had completed their student teaching practicum--this was their first classroom experience. Some indicated that their lesson plans were too short or too long. Others gained insight into teaching techniques and learned ways to increase student participation. Several university students noted that this was the best preparation for teaching they had received.

Teachers gave a positive response to their inservice experience. In small, rural schools, inservice is often difficult due to lack of time and resources. The school may not be able to finance substitute teachers to provide release time. This kind of field experience program allows the rural teacher an opportunity for professional renewal. The teacher can go off site for inservice with appropriate time allowed for learning and professional interaction.

The reciprocal relationships generated among school faculty, university faculty, and practicum students emphasized the importance of networking. The interrelationships provided advantageous opportunities for all participants.

Other participants were also positive. Rural school students enjoyed the program and the change in the classroom. In small, rural schools, having the same teacher for several grades and/or subjects is not unusual. The principal received positive feedback from the parents in the community. The principal hoped that this type of program would renew interest in rural schools. The only major change agreed upon by all participants was to make the experience a full week instead of three days.

Field experience programs such as this one can be applied in just about any small, rural school. Because the program lasts for an extended amount of time, it reduces the problems created by distance. Participants did not have to travel both directions in just one day or two days. For the university faculty and students, the distance traveled took five hours. Collaboration among U of O faculty and students and the rural administrators, teachers, and community provided a conducive environment for a successful field experience program.

Outcomes:

- Provides early field/teaching experience for perspective teachers
- Provides release time for inservice activities
- Involves community in school activity
- Provides an opportunity for rural students to havenew experiences in the classroom

- Provides University students with experience in rural schools and communities

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Teacher Education at Western Montana College of The University of Montana: A Distinctive Program Preparing Teachers for Rural Montana Schools

Morton, Claudette

The teacher education program at Western Montana College has developed several distinctive features that reflect an emphasis on preparation for successful teaching in Montana's rural schools. Students are given both a theoretical background for understanding rural education and the first-hand experience to put theory into practice. They also have the option of completing a broadfield major, which provides the diverse subject matter versatility valuable in rural schools.

Studies in anthropology are a special part of teacher education at Western. All students complete the introductory course in cultural anthropology with an emphasis on understanding how to become an effective member of the community in which they will teach. This type of coursework enables the student to discover the community's major economic resources and analyze community norms. The acquired techniques from this class are practiced during field experiences and student teaching.

Beginning with the exploratory field experience already mentioned, students at Western enter a series of field, clinical, and student teaching experiences designed to practice teaching with children from diverse rural backgrounds. Many Fridays during the elementary methods block semester children from selected rural schools in Beaverhead County come to the college for clinical sessions. During these sessions, methods block instructors model lessons with the children. In addition, teacher education students have a chance to try out their developing skills in carefully monitored situations. An example of this type of lesson would be a simulated fossil dig demonstrating anthropological research techniques.

The clinical experiences at the Western are followed up with carefully devised field experiences in rural schools. Prospective teachers use field manuals which guide them

through observations in classrooms and interviews with teachers. Many opportunities to try out lessons developed during methods classes are provided.

Student teachers are currently placed in a variety of rural teaching situations across a large area of Montana, providing the opportunity to bring to fruition the skills and knowledge acquired from their previous classes and field experiences. A week-long seminar during the course of student teaching allows students to come back to Western to share their experiences with each other and the faculty of the education program, as well as to put a last polish on their job-seeking skills.

The coordination of rural education research and curriculum development resides with the Rural Education Center of the Education Division. The Center receives institutional support from Western, administers grant programs such as the federal rural drug education program, operates the "Big Sky" telecommunications network with rural schools, provides outreach services to schools and sponsors courses and workshops at Western to meet the needs of rural educators.

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Professional Reading Groups

Staff Development Through Professional Reading And Discussion

Sullivan, Maureen A.
Journal of Staff Development, Spring 1987

Many factors can result in a rural teacher feeling uncomfortable trying new teaching practices in the classroom. The difficulty of change, self-confidence, or the traditional nature of the community may create concerns hindering the development of new practice. In a rural area, the school often comprises the largest part of local budgets (Mellencamp et al, 1991). Parents and community leaders are likely to know what practices are going on in the school and if a teacher is absent due to staff development activities. Although many rural teachers enjoy close community ties, they also feel they are under the community microscope. Factors outside the teachers control can also impede renewal efforts. These factors include lack of time, resources, finances, and incentives.

East Lansing, Michigan public schools have developed a staff development plan that deals with these factors in a professional reading and discussion program. The school has observed "improved faculty morale," "positively affected instruction," and "positive contacts with community members." The uniqueness of this program comes from participant makeup of the reading and discussion group. Teachers (ranging from new teachers to teachers nearing retirement) and administrators participate along with school board members, state university faculty, state department of education personnel, and local professionals involved in education.

The teachers were provided release time and their classes were taught by university faculty or volunteer substitute teachers. Originally, the budget provided for substitute teachers, but the money was rarely used because the regular school substitutes volunteered their time in the classroom for the opportunity to participate in the reading and discussion group. On a monthly basis, faculty and substitute teachers rotated teaching classes and attending the reading and discussion groups. Teachers were able to participate in renewal without devoting time outside the regular work day. They also had opportunities to share new ideas with community leaders and to have immediate feedback and understanding from them.

The school district paid for 12 subscriptions to professional journals that were selected by the teachers. Sullivan indicates that journals selected were not in a "how to" format. All selected journals dealt with topics in an indepth manner. Each reading and discussion session had a different discussion leader. Discussion leader selection was on a monthly rotation cycle to give all teachers a leadership opportunity. It was the discussion leader's responsibility to select a topic, applicable journal articles, and to copy and distribute articles to all participants two weeks in advance. A second leadership role -- that of program coordinator arranged journal subscriptions, classroom coverage, invitations to participants outside the school, and topic recommendations.

This program is not designed to be the only form of staff development in a district. However, it begins the movement toward the model of the professional organization where innovation, school, and community culture come together. Reading groups increased interaction between teachers focusing on professional topics. Sullivan indicates that, "In general, the whole atmosphere of the school became more professional in tone and interest." (p. 40). Interaction between beginning teachers and experienced teachers was also increased. While experienced teachers were able to share a realistic view of classroom management, beginning teachers were able to share the application of theory in a more practical sense .

East Lansing public schools are not rural. The program, however, is applicable for small, rural districts with limited finances for staff development. The Michigan Education Department has publicized this program specifically for small districts. The reading and discussion program can act as a catalyst in school community communications. The department of education awarded a certificate of merit to the program for linking with

the community. Small districts without access to a university could invite retired professionals or other community leaders to participate in the reading and discussion groups.

Outcomes:

- Increased professional atmosphere at schools.
- Increased collegiality.
- Enhanced educational practices in the classrooms.
- Improved communications between schools and communities.
- Encouraged study and reflection.
- Sensitivity to developmental differences among teachers.

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Conditions Affecting The Restructuring Of Rural Secondary Schools

Mellencamp, Amy V.
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April 1991 AERA presentation

A rural Vermont school district incorporated similar practices to promote change in its schools. In this case, emphasis was placed on participant decision-making, to increase staff collaboration and dedication to the change process.

In 1988, two schools in a rural Vermont district were selected to participate in a four-year project. The purpose of the project was to discover a way in which teachers could coordinate a variety of teaching strategies to serve the needs of all students. Six conditions vital to school improvement were identified:

1. Teacher commitment
2. Common understanding
3. Collaborative planning

4. An egalitarian process

5. Peer leadership

6. Support from higher education
(Mellencamp et al, 1991, pp. 6-8)

Over the course of a year, 12 four-hour seminars were offered after school. Careful attention was given to the six conditions critical to the change process.

In order for any change to occur participants must feel a commitment. These seminars were not offered during regular school hours, and commitment often depended on time availability, energy remaining at the end of a school day, and the incentive of three graduate credits. One of the schools also suffered through the serious illness of the principal who was participating in the project . Such factors can effect individual involvement in the project.

During the first seminar, participants agreed on the topics that would be discussed at the remaining 11 seminars. These topics were derived from a *common understanding* of what the teachers considered important issues for study and reflection. Guest speakers were selected from similar rural schools to speak on the various topics. Readings and case studies were provided to teachers in advance for conversation and reflection by the group, and the discussion leadership role was rotated among group members.

To establish goals for school improvement planning, the last five seminars were dedicated to collaborative planning. In the first of these five seminars, school faculty determined which guides would be used to establish the goals. The remaining four seminars were dedicated to developing action plans for achieving the school improvement planning goals. Participants were satisfied with their ability to fit a plan to meet perceived school needs.

Participants in the project included administrators and support staff along with the teachers. Because it was an egalitarian process, each participant had one vote and each participant contributed to the reflection and planning processes. Participation in the project was voluntary and approximately one-half of the staff chose to participate. Those staff members who were not involved in the project were consulted regularly, but did not develop a sense of ownership. Although participating staff did feel that the egalitarian process contributed to decision-making opportunities in other areas of the school, the lack of ownership among non-participating staff did prove to be an inhibiting factor in the establishing of a more egalitarian process.

A key cultural domain for bringing about school change is the role of the principal as conveyer of culture (Staessens, 1991). However, in the absence of a principal, other individuals can take over the leadership role (Gersten & Carnine, 1982; Glatthorn & Newberg, 1983 ; Miller, 1987). Condition five, peer leadership, directly addresses this

same issue. In order to encourage the implementation of the action plans for the school improvement goals, three staff members took over leadership roles. The staff members in the leadership roles were aware of the climate and culture of their school and were able to advise on the pace and terms under which changes took place. This was especially critical in the school where the principal had been ill; the school suffered a severe drop in morale.

Support from higher education has been critical for the collaborative planning to continue. At first staff was cautious of the higher education involvement. However, the reflective and planning process helped overcome initial staff skepticism. The school was not expected to make the latest trend in staff development fit its needs. The higher education faculty aided the staff in determining its schools needs and developing action plans to fit those needs. Plans were implemented at a pace that was best for the particular school climate and culture.

Though the schools in Vermont were rural and East Lansing is not, they both used professional reading and discussion to improve staff development efforts. Both were able to encourage commitment and participation through feelings of staff ownership. Professional communication lead to collaboration and leadership roles for staff members, two critical factors in professional renewal. Both the Vermont and East Lansing programs considered the importance of staff collaboration and teacher leadership. The authors of the Vermont schools presentation conclude with insight into the school change process:

> In rural areas, where schools serve as a community focus, change may regularly "stop and start," depending on the issues facing each school. A process that allows teachers to study and reflect, and then act through planning, may provide the flexibility and the responsibility for teachers to serve as partners in efforts to change and improve schools. (Mellencamp et al, 1991, p. 17)

Outcomes:

- Increased professional atmosphere at schools
- Increased collegiality
- Enhanced educational practices in the classrooms
- Improved communications between schools and communities
- Encouraged study and reflection
- Heightened sensitivity to developmental differences among teachers

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Telecommunications

Using Instructional Television To Support Beginning Teachers In Rural Isolated Communities

Bernhardt, Victoria L.
March 1989 AERA presentation

All beginning teachers experience some degree of isolation. These feelings result from a combination of factors: for a majority of a teacher's day he/she is isolated from colleagues, newer teachers are expected to be as competent as more experienced teachers, and certain aspects of teaching can only be learned in actual classroom experience. According to Bernhardt (1989), the teaching profession suffers an attrition rate of 40 percent by a teacher's second year.

The stress teachers experience as a result of isolation is even more severe for those who teacher in rural, isolated communities. These teachers also experience a sense of isolation from the community. Rural teachers often have access to limited finances and resources, making it difficult for them to get involved in professional renewal programs that could help them deal with the stress of isolation.

Although this kind of isolation-related stress can be experienced by beginning and/or more experienced teachers, it can be more difficult for beginning teachers. California State University in Chico has developed the Induction for the Beginning Teacher Program (IBT) specifically for delivery to the isolated rural areas of Northern California. This instructional television program (Bernhardt, 1989) can be beneficial to most rural, isolated schools and most levels of teacher experience.

The IBT deals with overcoming isolation and lack of opportunity for professional renewal in two ways. One, the beginning teacher participates in interactive televised seminars once a month. Second, the teacher is paired with an experienced teacher who has been trained in peer coaching. The peer coach participates with the beginning teacher in the seminars and also serves as a source of reinforcement of seminar concepts through classroom observation and feedback for a full year.

The major objective of the IBT is to build a support system that will:

- improve teachers' instructional abilities,
- enhance school climate and job satisfaction by reducing professional and geographic isolation,
- model professionalism,
- provide the opportunity for professional growth,
- teach self-assessment,
- improve teacher retention rates,
- retain the best teachers, and
- provide the best educational experience for school age learners (Bernhardt, 1989, p. 3)

To aid teachers to learn new teaching practices, each of the teaching teams (peer coach and beginning teacher) develops an action plan for implementing seminar concepts followed by weekly observations by the peer coach. The teaching team meets after each observation to discuss successes and "to plan the next logical step." By focusing on successes, the team creates a safe environment for teachers to practice new instructional techniques and increases self-efficacy for the beginning teacher. In an indirect way, it also reduces isolation for peer coaches while keeping them involved in the renewal activity.

The program has been considered successful because the retention rate of new and experienced teachers is improving in the IBT service area. There also have been positive changes observed in the teachers' classrooms. According to Bernhardt (1989), "The program has been able to meet the needs of the smallest, most isolated school district as well as the largest, most suburban school district in the service area."

A comprehensive final evaluation revealed positive results in combating professional isolation. Findings included:

- Strong bonds develop between beginning teacher and coach. The beginning teacher feels that the partnership is safe and knows that both parties are committed to excellence. A strong comraderie across teaching teams also develops. Isolation at the school site and within the region is reportedly greatly reduced.
- Teachers report that they benefit from their interaction with the teachers from other schools. Beginning teachers are amazed, and in some ways

relieved, to find that other beginning teachers and sometimes peer coaches experience some of the same difficulties they do.

- Beginning teachers' and peer coaches' self-esteem and job satisfaction have increased dramatically, in part because the program provides support and assistance for improvement and focuses on the positive qualities and skills of the teacher.

- Beginning teachers feel successful because they are able to work on one thing at a time and see the impact of their actions. Whenever beginning teachers make a successful change, they are able to describe up to five corollary changes that follow from it. Beginning teachers and peer coaches report seeing significant improvement in their effectiveness as teachers.

- Both the beginning teachers and the peer coaches cite numerous examples of how their instructional abilities have improved, making them feel more confident and comfortable in the classroom. They observe that as their own confidence increased, student achievement also increased.

- Retention of experienced teachers in the classroom has emerged as an unexpected benefit. A large number of experienced teachers who register for the program as peer coaches suffer from teacher burn-out. They enter the program hoping it will provide stimulation and new motivation for them. The program has proven its value in giving experienced teachers the renewal and rededication to stay in the classroom.
(Bernhardt, 1989, pp. 5-6)

In addition, site visits are made to participating teachers' schools. IBT instructional and administrative staff meet with the teachers and their administrators further encouraging a supportive atmosphere. During site visits, feedback from participants is received and technical assistance is offered to the teaching teams.

Televised staff renewal can be a positive tool for rural, isolated schools. The courses reach participants who may not have other options for professional interaction. Adding the peer coach can decrease feelings of isolation and create a safe environment for practicing new teaching techniquese. Site visits by the IBT staff involve the teachers' administrator and create a sense of support for the teaching innovations. The site visits also give teachers a sense of ownership by insuring that the programs fits their individual needs and by being receptive to participant feedback.

Outcomes:
- Increase in professional collaboration.
- Encouragement of supportive climate.

- Increased teacher retention.
- Increased teacher self-esteem and job satisfaction.
- Perceived improved student performance.
- Decreased feelings of isolation.

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Administrative Leadership

Native Administrators In Rural Schools

Grubis, S.

Understanding the community is critical for successful school leadership because it allows decision-making to fit within the norms and values of the community. Leadership style affects staff commitment to renewal efforts. In addition, administrative turnover may produce credibility problems which take time to overcome.

The administrator should integrate knowledge of the community and practical administrative technique. This can be quite challenging given the diversity of rural America.

Alaska illustrates this challenge. Ninety-five percent of the students in Alaska's 210 rural schools are native. In addition, Alaska is experiencing rapid political, economic, cultural, and educational change. Some villages have extremely high levels of substance abuse and other forms of destructive behavior. Administrators in these distressed communities must be sensitive to the evolving needs of the school and community.

The Native Administrators in Rural Alaska program (NARA) seeks to increase administrative leadership among the native population. Currently, 2.4 percent of Alaska state teachers are native. These teachers demonstrate stability and low attrition rates. The NARA proposes that native administrators would also demonstrate high levels of stability and low attrition.

NARA was developed by the Alaska Council of School Administrators and the University of Alaska. The purpose of NARA is to supplement the existing M.Ed. degree in Educational Leadership and to promote Native Alaskan access to leadership positions. Admission to NARA includes two steps: admission to the University of Alaska at Fairbanks (UAF) graduate program, and submission of a resume and statement of interest to a Regional Council of the UAF Rural College.

NARA stresses the importance of being raised near the communities in which administrators will be working in order to capitalize on their knowledge of local values and norms. NARA believes that informal channels of educational participation take precedence over the formal channels because of the small size of the communities. NARA also allows UAF students to integrate an awareness of community context while maintaining professionalism in a school that operates through channels of informal educational participation.

NARA enriches the M.Ed. degree requirements through audio conferences, statewide and regional seminars, coinciding NARA meetings with statewide educational meetings, incremental internships, and a summer institute. A series of audio conferences are conducted each semester in order to maintain collegial contact and opportunity for professional discussion. Statewide and regional seminars offer opportunities for personal contact and enhance group identity. Issues of educational leadership are explored, such as: "Issues and Concerns of Native Administrators," "Native Leadership: A Contradiction in Terms?," and "The Rural Schools Principals Network" (pp. 9-10). Planning NARA seminars to coincide with statewide educational meetings creates a wider forum of issues. Instead of an administrator internship occurring at the end of a student's degree program, incremental internship provide ongoing support and reinforcement of administrative techniques. The internship is separated into a number of parts to be dispersed over a longer span of time. The summer institute consists of a week of instructional activity and social gatherings. In addition to NARA participants, the institute includes practicing rural school principals.

In summary, the Native Administrators for Rural Alaska program operates on several assumptions:

- Native administrators will demonstrate the same qualities of existing native teachers (i.e. stability and low attrition rates)
- Reduction of administrative turnover is critical in distressed communities if the schools are to maintain adequate levels of education
- Administrators growing up in close proximity to where they work will have better understanding of informal channels of educational participation

- NARA provides support needed for the Native administrator to successfully integrate community understanding and administrative leadership technique

The process of building a cadre of well qualified Native Alaskan educators to take on the role of administrative leadership will be a long-term project. NARA hopes to influence school-community relationships in a positive and significant way that will increase educational attainment and community stability.

Outcomes:

- Current M.Ed. program is supplemented to increase administrative sensitivity to community values and norms
- Audio conferences, seminars, and institutes increase professional collaboration
- Increased higher education attention to the plight of rural schools
- Awareness of community/school interconnectedness

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Networks

Teachers from rural and metropolitan areas alike experience feelings of isolation. In Lortie's classic book, Schoolteacher, (1975) he describes classroom isolation:

> Despite the proximity it [multiple-classroom schools] introduced, . . . the subsequent work relationships of teachers have been marked more by separation than by interdependence; most teachers still spend most of their time working alone with a group of students in a bounded area. In industry, . . . patterns of cooperation have followed technological requirements which reorder relationships among workers. (p. 23)

A very small portion of the teacher's day is dedicated to professional interaction or collaboration. This lack of opportunity for professional relationships leading to isolation is magnified in rural districts, where there are fewer teachers and administrators in the immediate area and greater distances between schools.

Alaska Staff Development Network:
Working Together To Make Schools Better

Alaska is a rural state where great distances and difficult terrain separate schools and districts. Alaska developed a network, the Alaska Staff Development Network, to encourage professional interaction and staff development. The network is a coalition of the Alaska Department of Education, NEA-Alaska, the Alaska Council of School Administrators, Alaska's five universities and colleges, 50 of Alaska's 54 school districts, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, and several education professional organizations. The network sponsors more than 200 training sessions annually. Although participation is voluntary, more than half of Alaska's teachers and administrators participate.

The Alaska Staff Development Network has been recognized nationally for its support programs for rural educators and is considered one of the nation's ten best staff development programs. Representatives of network member agencies have generated nine major programs:

- The Alaska School Leadership Academy
- The Academy of Applied Research in Education
- The Rural and Interior Alaska Instructional Improvement Academy
- The Southcentral Alaska Instructional Improvement Academy
- The Rural Alaska Mentor Teacher Project
- The Network's Coalition for Alaskan At-Risk Youth
- Network Publications
- The Network's Technical Assistance Project
- The Network Materials Center

In addition, the network produces a semi-annual newsletter, *The Networker*.

The network maintains a small staff of director and administrative assistant. The Alaska Department of Education and the University of Alaska Southeast work together to administer the program, and a steering committee governs it. Initially the state provided 100 percent of the funding. Now the state only funds 5 percent with the remainder

covered by districts, professional associations, universities, private foundations, the U.S. Department of Education, and individual participants.

The Alaska Staff Development Network has been successful in increasing staff development in rural, isolated districts of Alaska. By recognizing the importance of professional renewal, the state has sent a message to teachers and administrators that they are vital contributors to the improvement of state schools.

Outcomes:

- Increased job satisfaction.
- Reduced staff turnover.
- Increased professional relationships.
- Increased staff development opportunities.
- Reduced feelings of isolation.
- State-wide increase of educational related communications.

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Maine's Support Network For Rural Special Educators:
Success Through Communication

National Association of State Directors of Special Education

The Maine Rural Special Education Network was developed in 1986 due to the high turnover of special education staff in Maine's rural schools. The major reasons for the high turnover were identified as the physical, intellectual, and emotional isolation the special education teachers were experiencing. The impact this turnover had on children with special education needs in rural Maine could not be overlooked.

The Network identified several assumptions:

- Teachers and related service personnel need support as well as challenge in their jobs
- Collegiality is a necessary condition for professional growth
- Teachers can play a powerful role in helping one another
- Structures can be developed to allow and encourage such continued growth

These assumptions reflect the importance of collaboration and a supportive climate. By interacting, special education teachers learn new ideas. They also realize that they are not the only ones feeling isolated. Although this network was designed to retain special education teachers and support service personnel, regular teachers are also encouraged to participate. Ninety percent of all school districts in Maine participate in the network program; approximately 75 percent of special education teachers and support service personnel are directly involved.

Transferring information and support occurs in several ways. Regional support groups are organized through seven sections of the state. Each region conducts three peer support and problem-solving sessions annually. Although these sessions include some content-related information, their main purpose is to provide support for participants. Teachers' Academies are conducted each summer. The regions divide into two groups and each group hosts a summer academy. The academy lasts four days and emphasizes professional, social/personal development. The academies are based on the needs identified by the regions participating. Winter Retreats are also held once a year. The retreat is a state wide function that focuses on peer support, networking, and collegiality.

After four years of operation, the network conducted a job satisfaction survey. The results indicated an increase in job satisfaction and a decrease in feelings of isolation. There were also indications that the sharing of resources and teaching strategies had improved job performance. The network design is applicable in other rural regions and

is easily replicated. Originally the program was funded by federal government grant It will be funded 100 percernt by the state of Maine this year.

Outcomes:

- Increased job satisfaction
- Reduced staff turnover
- Increased professional relationships
- Increased staff development opportunities
- Reduced feelings of isolation
- State-wide increase of educational related communications

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In summary, both networks targeted the need to overcome problems of professional, physical, and emotional isolation and the negative effect it had on job satisfaction. The primary solution focused on bringing teaching professionals together and increasing state wide communication. Program outcomes revealed that resource sharing and professional discussion leads to professional renewal.

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